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RABI'A FROM NARRATIVE TO MYTH:
THE TROPICS OF IDENTITY OF A MUSLIM WOMAN SAINT

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Rkia Elaroui Cornell

geboren te Sefrou, Morocco

To my dissertation advisors:

Prof. Dr. Pieternella A. Van Doorn-Harder

and

Prof. Dr. Hendrik M. Vroom.

Without you this work would never have been written.

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ABSTRACT

This work is a study of the Muslim saint Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (ca. 717-801 CE), as she has been depicted in Sufi and non-Sufi literature. Although evidence suggests that a woman ascetic named Rabi'a actually lived in Basra, Iraq, in the eighth century CE, very little historical information can be established about her. The great majority of the Rabi'a narratives consist of tropological constructs and fictional accounts composed in the centuries after her death. Thus, this study is primarily about historical and literary representation and the construction of myth. The subject of historical representation is discussed theoretically in the Introduction. Four main tropes or master narratives are identified that define Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as a Sufi saint: Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, Rabi'a the Lover, and Rabi'a the Sufi. Each of these tropes is discussed in detail in Chapters 1-4, tracing their development, major rhetorical themes, and doctrinal meaning in the Rabi'a narratives. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss Rabi'a the Icon, showing how she has become a symbolic figure in both Sufi and modern secular representations. Chapter 5 discusses her portrayal by the Persian Sufi Farid al-Din al-'Attar (d. 1220 CE), who composed the first *vita* of Rabi'a and provided the outline for all further biographical narratives. Chapter 6 discusses secular versions of the Rabi'a narrative, which use tropes derived from modern philosophies such as existentialism and feminism. These tropes are also influential in the depiction of Rabi'a's story in cinematic film and television. The Conclusion reassesses the historiographical issues raised by the Rabi'a narratives with respect to the role of literary theories and approaches in historical studies. This work draws on numerous sources, both medieval and modern, in Arabic, Persian, and European languages. It discusses the major schools of representation of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in medieval Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Egypt and takes the discussion up through modern scholarly writings and cinematic depictions. Using these writings and depictions as source materials, the work also provides a critical approach to the historiographical and literary study of sainthood.

INTRODUCTION

RABI'A, "THE WOMAN WHO NEVER DIES"

In October 1804 the Lewis and Clark expedition, which was organized to explore and map the lands along the Missouri River in the American Midwest, entered the area where the Cannonball River and the Heart River join the Missouri River in present-day North Dakota. They were following a map made by a member of the Mandan tribe, who was asked to locate the site of Mandan villages and important landmarks. The Mandans called the region between the Heart and Cannonball Rivers "Heart of the Land" because it was the center of their world and the heartland of their culture. It was here that Lone Man, the first being, and First Creator, the Coyote, brought up mud from the Missouri River and its tributaries to build the Mandan villages. South of the Cannonball River was the home of Old Woman Who Never Dies. "Of all female life on earth I am the head," she said. "Cold and blizzard I subdue . . . I make whatever I plant to grow."[1]

Old Woman Who Never Dies originally came from a region far to the south of the Mandan homeland. When she heard about the villages that Lone Man and Coyote had created, she resolved to come north and make a female of each species so that life could continue. For the Mandan and related Hidatsa peoples, Old Woman Who Never Dies symbolized the female power of rebirth and regeneration; she was the spirit of vegetation and guaranteed the growth of agricultural crops. Her spirit also entered the body of the Rocky Mountains to make sure that the rivers would always flow. Her creative spirit entered into the body of the first woman to insure that females would always produce children. Out of her spirit, she created Woman Above and the Holy Women of the Groves of the Four Directions.

The Holy Women were spirits of great power who acted as teachers for chosen men. In the sacred ceremonies of the Mandan and related Hidatsa peoples, both men and women performed special rituals for the Holy Women so that women would be respected. According to some legends, Old Woman Who Never Dies maintained her immortality by bathing in the Missouri River and its tributaries; each time she bathed in the river she came up younger, until she came up as a young girl.[2] According to other legends, she still kept a home far to the south of Mandan territory, where the Mississippi River empties into the Gulf of Mexico. Here she lived in a hut beside the sea and ate corn porridge with spoons made of clamshells.[3]

When I was a young girl growing up in the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco, I had no idea about the Mandan people or Old Woman Who Never Dies. However, I did know something about holy people. I was born into a family that traced its origins to *murabitin*, holy people of the Moroccan countryside. My ancestors were the Banu Amghar, a family of Moroccan saints that created one of the first *ribats* or Sufi teaching centers in rural Morocco. This *ribat* was located near a spring called Tit-n-Fitr: "Spring of Sustenance" in the Tamazight language. Known today as Moulay Abdellah, Ribat Tit-n-Fitr can still be seen on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, several kilometers south of the city of El Jedida. Many

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[1] Carolyn Gilman, *Lewis and Clark: Across the Divide* (Washington, D. C. and London: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 153

[2] Virginia Bergman Peters, *Women of the Earth Lodges: Tribal Life on the Plains* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000 reprint of 1995 first edition), 31-34

[3] Alfred W. Bowers, *Mandan Social and Ceremonial Organization* (Lincoln, Nebraska and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004 reprint of 1950 University of Chicago Press first edition), 197-205

legends are told about the holy men of the Banu Amghar, and even today, the festival of Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad Amghar (fl. 1133 CE) attracts thousands of visitors each year.[4]

Unlike most girls in rural Morocco in the early 1960s, my father allowed me to leave my native town for school, first in the small city of Sefrou near Fez and later in the regional capital of Meknès. At an early age, I was taught the Qur'an because Qur'anic learning was my family's tradition. Although my father was a reformer and an innovator, he took his heritage seriously and tried to maintain the most important traditions of the family. During each vacation from school, I would spend long periods with him, sharing what I had learned and listening to the stories and teachings that he related. I developed a reputation for being different from the other girls of my town. I read a lot, I kept to myself, and I did not think of marriage as a goal. Because I also had a serious inclination toward religion, the other girls of my town gave me a nickname that persisted throughout my childhood and adolescence: "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya."

Despite being compared to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as a child, it did not occur to me to write about her until I published my book *Early Sufi Women* in 1999.[5] After all, my nickname was not a compliment. For boys in particular, it meant that I was strange and that summoning up the courage to get to know me was more trouble than it was worth. I only thought of writing about Rabi'a after I saw how she was depicted by the Persian Sufi Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021 CE). Sulami portrayed Rabi'a very differently from most of the legends and hagiographic accounts about her that I knew. Sulami's Rabi'a was not a dreamy love-mystic. Instead, she was a tough-minded and clear-headed ascetic and spiritual master. At turns both a rationalist and a mystic, she was respected by men for the depth and wisdom of her teachings. She even had male disciples. In addition, when I edited and translated Sulami's Book of Sufi Women, I discovered something that Sulami had overlooked— Rabi'a was not a unique figure in her time but instead represented a tradition of women's spirituality that went back more than a century before her. It was then that I resolved to write a book on Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and found my chance to do so in the pursuit of a doctoral degree at the Free University of Amsterdam.

But what was I to say about Rabi'a? How could I find a framework that would make sense of the numerous and often contradictory narratives— both Sufi and non-Sufi— that led to the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as she is known in the Muslim world today? What metaphor could sum up the different versions of Rabi'a from medieval to modern times? I discovered a solution to this dilemma in 2004 on a visit to St. Louis, Missouri during the Bicentennial Celebration of the Lewis and Clark expedition. At the St. Louis Gateway Arch Bookstore, I bought a copy of Carolyn Gilman's excellent coffee-table book, *Lewis and Clark: Across the Divide*. This book introduced me to the legend of Old Woman Who Never Dies. I realized that a similar metaphor could apply to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. With the possible exception of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima, more than any other woman in the history of Islam, Rabi'a is the Woman Who Never Dies.

I. THE MYTH OF RABI'A AL-'ADAWIYYA AS A MASTER NARRATIVE

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[4] For information on the Banu Amghar, see Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1998), 32-62

[5] Abu 'Abd ar-Rahman as-Sulami, *Early Sufi Women:* Dhikr an-niswa al-muta'abbidat as-sufiyyat, edited and translated with Introduction by Rkia E. Cornell (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1999)

Because Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is a figure of myth, she is not a normal subject of history. In fact, she does not appear in most medieval histories or biographical works in the Islamic world. Instead, she mostly appears in hagiographic narratives and in Sufi doctrinal works. As best as we can tell, her biography is largely— if not entirely— fictional. Her status as a subject of historical inquiry is mainly a product of the twentieth century. Because of this, she upsets the normal distinction made in historiography between historical research and historical writing. Usually, one researches and assesses historical documents and archival sources and then puts the conclusions of research into writing.[6] However, with Rabi'a, there are no sources to consult other than hagiographies and other literary works, and these are not historical documents in the normal sense of the term. As she is known today, Rabi'a is a figure of literature and all the information that is known about her comes through literature. Thus, to write about her one must make use of literature and take literary forms of representation into account.

In the modern period, scholars of Islamic Studies in both Europe and the Arab world have tried to de-mythologize the figure of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in order to write about her historically. This has created two problems. First, some writers make the mistake of treating the literary representations of Rabi'a uncritically as historical data or empirical facts.[7] Naïvely, they accept virtually everything that is written about her. This is clearly a mistake, because as we shall see in the chapters below, not only is most of what is written about Rabi'a governed by tropes more than empirical reality but key elements of her story, especially her *vita* or life-story, can be shown to be fictional, even if they are represented as facts.

Second, in trying to avoid the naivety of the previous group of writers, others go too far in the opposite direction. By trying to treat Rabi'a in a purely empirical manner, they diminish her as a religious and cultural figure by either dismissing her as a subject of history altogether or by stripping away the levels of figurative meaning that have made her an important part of Islamic cultural memory.[8] As a figure of cultural memory, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is not unlike the Islamic mythical figure of al-Khidr (The Green One), who in Muslim folklore reappears in every age to guide a new generation of seekers with his wisdom.[9] As Mircea Eliade has observed, myths and stories (including hagiographies and modern histories) often contain the same tropes, despite being expressed in different idioms. Eliade believed that whenever the figurative meaning of an account of the past is paramount (or as he put it, when "the essential precedes existence"), one is in the realm of myth.[10]

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[6] Frank Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2012), 60

[7] This approach characterizes the great majority of works written on Rabi'a in the modern period, including a vast amount of Internet references that are too numerous to count.

[8] See for example, Julian Baldick, "The Legend of Rabi'a of Basra: Christian Antecedents, Muslim Counterparts," *Religion* 19 (1990). Baldick's view of the Rabi'a narratives as fictional is apparent in the title of this article. His concern is mainly to identify literary *topoi* that he can compare with Christian antecedents, without discussing their figural meaning or the role that they play in the construction of the Rabi'a myth.

[9] See Hugh Talat Halman, *Where the Two Seas Meet: The Qur'anic Story of al-Khidr and Moses in Sufi Commentaries as a Model of Spiritual Guidance* (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2013). Much like the present work, this book examines the figure of al-Khidr both as a mythical figure and as a product of literature.

[10] Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, Willard R. Trask, trans. (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1998 reprint of 1963 original), 92; Eliade struggles with the question of the status of myth in modernity throughout most of the second half of this work.

Following the example of Eliade, but also using other theorists of myth and narrative such as Roland Barthes, Hayden White, and Aleksei Fyodorovich Losev, this study examines the accounts, dicta, and stories that make up the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, both in terms of their meaning and their form or structure. To paraphrase Barthes, I imagine the narratives that make up the Rabi'a myth not as an apricot but as an onion. If the "fruit" is the narrative content and the "pit" is the factual core, I do not consider the core to be the essence of the content, as with an apricot. Rather, I look at the narratives that make up the Rabi'a myth as if they were parts of an onion: a superimposed construction of skins, layers, levels, and forms of narrative with a "core" that can only be discerned when a new plant (i.e., a new image of Rabi'a) sprouts from the center.[11] Since the invisible core of an onion generates new content, this metaphor expresses a dialectical relationship between the formal construction of the Rabi'a narratives and her mythical representation, as discussed in the works of Barthes and Losev, in particular.

When a myth is viewed as a product of narrative construction, it allows the student of sacred biography or other forms of myth to avoid a major problem of historicism. From the point of view of historicism, the task of a study on Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya would be as follows: (1) to examine the information on Rabi'a as it has appeared in premodern and modern sources; and (2) to try to discern what can be stated about the "real" Rabi'a as she lived and practiced her faith. However, as stated above, there are no empirical source materials that can tell us conclusively what the "real" Rabi'a was like or how she practiced her faith. All we know is what the figurative Rabi'a is represented as doing. There are a few accounts of purported eyewitnesses, but until more evidence can be found it is virtually impossible to establish their veracity. Thus, it is not possible to address satisfactorily the historicist dichotomy of fact versus fiction.[12] In practical terms, there is no other recourse but to examine the *representations* of Rabi'a in narratives and the *interpretations* of her identity or mythical image. Under these circumstances, the issue of separating the "historical" Rabi'a from the "figurative" Rabi'a is not only practically impossible but also it is theoretically not as crucial as it would be if a greater amount of non-literary evidence were available.

Thus, the literary turn that I take in this work (especially in Chapters 3, 5, and 6) is not so much a theoretical position as a pragmatic consideration; it does not mean, "anything goes." As the saying goes, "Necessity is the mother of invention." Roland Barthes' onion metaphor is appropriate for the study of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya because it is nearly impossible to find a historical "pit" or core of empirical truth in the many layers of Rabi'a narratives. Although circumstantial evidence suggests that a well-known woman by the name of Rabi'a lived in the region of Basra in southern Iraq in the eighth century CE, little else can be established according to empirical historical methods. However, this does not mean that one cannot or should not conduct a historical study of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. It only means that it must be done using different historiographical methods. As noted above, the normal

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[11] Roland Barthes, "Style and Its Image," in idem, *The Rustle of Language*, Richard Howard trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 99; for Barthes, an onion does not have a core. However, as every cook knows, the core of an onion becomes visible only when a new onion plant starts to sprout from it.

[12] In historicism, a thing is defined by its history. In a way, the present work also attempts to do this for Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya by tracing the historical development of the Rabi'a myth through her representation in hagiography, Sufi literature, non-Sufi literature, and modern studies. However, historicism also posits a kernel or "truth" of the thing that history reveals, like the pit in Barthes' apricot metaphor. Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) called this kernel of truth a "seed." The point of using Barthes' onion metaphor is to express the fact that there is no empirical "seed" out of which to develop a normal historical study of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. See Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference*, 2.

dichotomy of fact-finding versus history writing cannot apply in this case. This forces the researcher to find a different way in which to study Rabi'a. If one takes the position with Hayden White, F. R. Ankersmit, and others that the term, "history," can include literary genres of representation, then it is possible to conceive of a historical study of Rabi'a as her image has been constructed over time through different forms of literature.

As the title, *Rabi'a from Narrative to Myth* implies, this study is more concerned with how Rabi'a is represented than with the alleged details of her existence. What is most important in this perspective is that she has been represented in multiple narrative forms and multiple genres of literature and modern media for over 1200 years. Moreover, she provides through these representations an exemplary image that has inspired countless people in different times, places, and cultures. Just as Old Woman Who Never Dies becomes a young girl again each time she bathes in the river, so too the mythical image of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya becomes young and vital again by periodically "bathing" in narrative. Today, these narratives are popular among both Muslims and non-Muslims, and can be found in both Sufi and non-Sufi literature, in local traditions, songs, movies, and even a television miniseries.

The paradox of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is that her name is known by nearly everyone but the "real" Rabi'a is known by no one. In the term coined by the Belgian sociologist of religion Pierre Delooz, she is a "constructed saint"— a composite figure of legends, dicta, literary narratives, poems, and hagiographic accounts that have taken on the aura of fact.[13] Both the purported details of Rabi'a's life and the meaning of her sainthood depend on representations that have varied according to differences of Sufi doctrine, literary convention, and authorial intent. These representations consist of religious, literary, philosophical, and even secular tropes that together make up the composite image of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, the quintessential woman saint of Islam. Like a mirage in the desert, this image remains forever on the horizon. It shifts and changes according to whatever perspective one uses to view it. Just as with a mirage, the further one is from the "real" Rabi'a, the more one feels she sees her. Conversely, the closer one gets to the sources that provide the data of Rabi'a's life and teachings, the less one finds objectivity or even consensus. Like a mirage, her image begins to dissolve whenever one views it at close range. However, when viewed again from greater distance and a different perspective she reappears, clothed in yet another representation that defines her identity for a new generation of admirers.

In the field of Communications Studies, the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya would be a *master narrative*: "a transhistorical narrative that is deeply embedded in a particular culture."[14] Because it stands for a master narrative, the very name, "Rabi'a," conjures up for Muslims an image based on a variety of stories and dicta that have been transmitted by both Sufis and non-Sufis over the centuries. As we shall see in Chapter 5, the association of a mythical figure like Rabi'a with multiple layers of meaning is not unlike what happens with an icon in an Orthodox Christian church. In an Orthodox icon, a single image can evoke a

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[13] Pierre Delooz, *Sociologie et Canonisations* (Liège, Belgium: Université de Liège Faculté de Droit, 1969), 7-14

[14] Jeffry R. Halverson, H. L. Goodall, Jr., and Steven R. Corman, *Master Narratives of Islamic Extremism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 14; the concept of the master narrative in this book comes from Walter R. Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1989). The concept of the master narrative is also used in anthropology and social theory. See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 48-65, where he uses the concept of the master narrative to critique ethnologies of colonialism and to advocate a transnational anthropology based on narratives of "imagined lives." In a certain sense, the present study attempts a similar project.

variety of associations. In this sense, one could say that the mythical Rabi'a is an icon too, except that her image is evoked through literature rather than through painting. However, now that she has been represented through movies and television, her image also carries something of the visual aspect of an actual icon. As a master narrative, the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is part of an ongoing process of reciprocal composition: it both shapes other narratives and is shaped by them.

A narrative is defined as "a coherent system of interrelated and sequentially organized stories that share a common rhetorical desire to resolve a conflict by establishing audience expectations according to the known trajectories of its literary and rhetorical forms."[15] Based on this definition, we can say that the master narrative of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was first created by the Sufi Farid al-Din al-'Attar (d. 1220 CE). 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a in the hagiographic anthology *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* (Memorial of the Saints) established the model for her life story. However, three centuries before 'Attar elements of her myth had already begun to appear in the form of dicta and narrative tropes. Stories and accounts that contain narrative tropes are often recounted for rhetorical or ideological purposes.[16]

As this study will reveal, the master narrative of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is composed of four main tropes: Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, Rabi'a the Lover, and Rabi'a the Sufi. Each of these tropes comprises a chapter of the present study. Chapters 5 and 6, which deal with the trope of "Rabi'a the Icon," include all of the previous tropes plus new tropes that emerged in the twentieth century from the rewriting of her *vita* by academic scholars, novelists, and dramatists. As part of a continuous process of representation and interpretation, Rabi'a emerges anew in each period of literary activity. This process has not only continued in the modern period, but has been intensified as well. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the story of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya has been transformed through the influence of Existentialist philosophy, the modern novel, radio, television, and cinema. I have put the narrative of Rabi'a's life story, as it appears in modern literature and media, in the final chapters of this study rather than at the beginning because this example best illustrates the transformation of the Rabi'a narrative from master narrative to myth.

According to the communications theorist Walter R. Fisher, a narrative can be subjected to two tests of validity or rationality. The first test is the test of *narrative probability*, or whether the narrative is coherent and makes sense.[17] To be coherent, a narrative must be systematic: "The stories must relate to one another in consistent ways, and carry a common theme [or related themes]. They must form a structure where one story reinforces, elaborates, or combines with another so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts."[18] The second test of narrative validity is *narrative fidelity*, or whether the narrative relates to the world as the audience understands it. Narratives make sense of the situations they relate by establishing archetypal characters, relationships, and standard actions that the audience can understand.[19]

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[15] Halverson, Goodall, and Corman, *Master Narratives of Islamic Extremism*, 14

[16] Ibid, 13

[17] Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration* in Ibid, 24

[18] Ibid

[19] Ibid. Narrative probability and narrative fidelity are related to Roland Barthes' concept of the "reality effect," which is discussed in Chapters 4-6. Narrative fidelity is also related to Hendrik M. Vroom's thesis of how the truth claims of religious stories are based in the audience's basic experiences, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

The use of narrative tropes helps a narratives pass these tests by allowing the audience to recognize common patterns in the way characters and their actions relate to each other. This allows them to derive a common meaning for the master narrative. Major narrative tropes in the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya such as Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, Rabi'a the Lover, and Rabi'a the Sufi can become master narratives because each is made up of its own set of archetypal characters, relationships, and actions and each passes the tests of narrative validity and narrative probability. In addition, the narrative elements in each of these tropes are related to narrative elements in the other tropes, such that one could plot the relationships between these tropes or archetypes in a diagram. In this way, the narratives of Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, Rabi'a the Lover, and Rabi'a the Sufi form a matrix or web of tropes that make up the composite master narrative of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. This study will demonstrate how the elements of this matrix fit together and show how this master narrative was tranformed into a myth. As long as the narrative elements of Rabi'a's story continue to make sense and have relevance for her audience, we can refer to her metaphorically as the Woman Who Never Dies.

II. KEY PREMODERN SOURCES AND MODERN WORKS ON RABI'A AL-'ADAWIYYA

The narratives of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya are too numerous to count. This situation has become even more problematical since the creation of the Internet. A Google search of the name "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya" comes up with 28,800 entries; the name "Rabi'a al-Basri" yields about 179,000 entries; the name "Rabi'a" yields over 24 million entries because girls and women who are currently named Rabi'a are also included. The trouble with this mass of information is that very little of it can be used as historical source-material. Mostly the stories, quotations, and anecdotes about Rabi'a recycle information contained in a handful of key narratives that span a 1200-year period from the mid-ninth century CE to the present. Because it is impossible to cover all of the works— even the premodern ones— that mention Rabi'a, I will concentrate in this study on the medieval and modern narratives that were most influential in creating her master narrative.

For a figure about whom there seems to be so much information, it comes as a surprise to learn that there is no contemporaneous historical information on the life of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. As noted above, the first version of Rabi'a's *vita* or life story was not written until 400 years after the approximate date of her death. Works that provide even a small amount of credible historical information on Rabi'a are very rare. As discussed in Chapter 1, only a handful of sources mention her in the century after her death. Since some of these sources are currently missing, information from them must be gleaned by searching later sources for quotations and citations from these works. The earliest mention of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is a single statement attributed to her in the doctrinal work *al-Qasd wa-l-ruju' ila Allah* (God as the Goal and the Return), by the Sufi al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi of Baghdad (d. 857 CE). This is the earliest extant work to mention Rabi'a and no one has identified it previously. The second work to contain information on Rabi'a was *Kitab al-ruhban* (The Book of Monks), a work on asceticism by Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Burjulani of Baghdad (d. 852 CE). Two citations of Rabi'a from this work can be identified in later sources. Burjulani's citations of Rabi'a may actually be older than Muhasibi's; however, we cannot be certain of their date because the work itself has been lost. This is one reason why Burjulani's *Kitab al-ruhban* also has not been cited previously by modern scholars. These citations by Muhasibi and Burjulani are the earliest references to Rabi'a in Sufi literature.

The earliest non-Sufi references to Rabi'a are in the works of two major literary figures of Abbasid-era Baghdad. The first of these is Abu 'Uthman al-Jahiz (d. 868 CE), a famous theologian, essayist, and rhetorician who mentions Rabi'a in two of his books, *Kitab al-hayawan* (The Book of Animals) and *Kitab al-bayan wa-l-tabyin* (Treatise on the Demonstrative Proof and the Art of Persuasion). Scholars have known about Jahiz's citations of Rabi'a for many years. However, previous scholars have not identified the references to Rabi'a in another important work from the generation after Jahiz. This is *Kitab balaghat al-nisa'* (Book of the Eloquence of Women) by Ahmad ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur of Baghdad (d. 893 CE). *Balaghat al-nisa'* is the first book devoted entirely to women in Arabic literature. Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's references to Rabi'a have not been identified previously because he does not refer to her as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya or even as Rabi'a al-Qaysiyya, which is how Jahiz refers to her. Instead, he calls her *Rabi'a al-Musmi'iyya*, "The Woman Who Must Be Heard." However, we can be certain that this figure is Rabi'a because some of the quotations that are attributed to her by Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur are the same as those that are found in Jahiz.

What historical information can be ascertained from the earliest sources on Rabi'a? As stated above, there is very little except to confirm that a famous ascetic and teacher named Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya or Rabi'a al-Qaysiyya (the first name refers to refers to her clan and the second name refers to refers to her tribe) existed in or around the city of Basra in southern Iraq in the eighth century CE. This is important because otherwise one might assume that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is merely a figure of literature. Even the exact dates of her birth and death are not known. The commonly accepted birth date of 717 CE and death date of 801 CE come from a much later period and the ultimate source of these dates is unclear. Everything about Rabi'a is tentative. However, the early citations mentioned above are valuable historically because of their closeness to Rabi'a in place and time. Two authors— Muhasibi and Jahiz— were born in Rabi'a's home city of Basra. Because of this, they could have known people who knew her personally. Clearly, they heard stories about her and were aware of her reputation; otherwise, they would not have mentioned her. local reputation is the best evidence we have that she existed. In addition, the non-Sufi writers Jahiz and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur are important sources on Rabi'a because they use her as a rhetorical example. Both writers regard her as a figure of eloquence, even though she came from outside their own literary and intellectual tradition. They could not have used her in this way if her reputation had not been widely known, much as the reputation of Mother Theresa is known today.

In the classic study *Oral Tradition as History*, Jan Vansina defines oral traditions as "verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation."[20] According to Vansina, in order to be used as historical evidence, an oral tradition must establish one or more links between the later record of a report (whether transmitted orally or in writing) and the original observation on which the tradition is based. If such a link does not exist, the tradition cannot be used as historical evidence. However, if a link can be established, the tradition should not be dismissed as unhistorical.

In Islamic literature, the links between the written record and the initial observation are often passed down in chains of transmission (Ar. *isnad*, pl. *asanid*). In the culture of oral tradition in Islam, the chains of transmission that accompany oral accounts are considered proofs of the authenticity of the traditions they support. Vansina views oral traditions as evidence in much the same way. According to him, the historian should view a tradition "as a

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[20] Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London and Nairobi, Kenya: James Curry and Heinemann Kenya, 1985), 27

series of successive historical documents all lost except for the last one and usually interpreted by every link in the chain of transmission. It is therefore evidence at second, third, or nth remove, but it is still evidence unless it be shown that a message does not rely on a first statement made by an observer."[21] The same can be said of traditions about Rabi'a in the early sources. Although we must not make the mistake of treating oral traditions as if their contents are fixed as in written documents, they can still provide important evidence of past events, situations, statements, or ideas. For this reason, it is justifiable to take the aphorisms and citations of Rabi'a in the earliest sources as circumstantial evidence of her historical existence.

However, to conclude that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya probably existed does not make the voice that speaks through these traditions entirely hers. She wrote no books and no account of her was written during her lifetime. Although certain poems have been attributed to her, these attributions are questionable at best. To date, no written body of work has been linked conclusively to Rabi'a. In addition, narrative tropes are already found in some of the earliest sources mentioned above. For example, I discuss in Chapter 1 how Jahiz uses the figure of Rabi'a as an example of the "person of *bayan*," a rhetorical trope from the Abbasid era that combined notions of eloquence and wisdom and which defined for Jahiz the ideal of the person of reason.

The 350 years between the mid-eighth century CE and the beginning of the twelfth century CE comprise the period in which the most important Sufi tropes of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya were developed. The process of turning the narratives of Rabi'a into narrative tropes began around the end of the tenth century CE. By this time the geographical location of the Sufis who related these narratives had expanded to include not only Iraq but also Syria and Khorasan, a region that comprises eastern Iran and much of Central Asia. It was in Iraq, Syria, and Khorasan that the tropes of Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, Rabi'a the Lover, and Rabi'a the Sufi were developed. Two Sufi writers were especially important in this process.

The first of these Sufi writers was Abu Talib al-Makki of Baghdad (d. 996 CE), who mentions Rabi'a prominently in his doctrinal work *Qut al-qulub* (The Sustenance of Hearts). Rabi'a was a key figure in Makki's mystical theology of Love. Although statements on divine love attributed to Rabi'a appear in the works of earlier Sufis, the prominence that Makki gives her allows us to identify him as the creator of the narrative trope of Rabi'a the Lover. For Makki, Rabi'a's love of God symbolizes the highest station of Love mysticism. Makki also depicts Rabi'a as a sage who initiates her disciples into the mysteries of Love. I discuss in Chapter 3 how Makki's rhetorical use of Rabi'a is similar to Plato's rhetorical use of the priestess Diotima of Mantinaea in *The Symposium*. In Plato's work, Diotima initiates Socrates into the mysteries of Love, just as Rabi'a is used by Makki to initiate his readers into the Sufi theology of Love.

The second Sufi to develop major narrative tropes about Rabi'a was Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021 CE), who lived in the eastern Iranian city of Nishapur. Sulami was one of the greatest systematizers of Sufism as a form of orthodox mysticism. He depicts Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as the quintessential Sufi woman in his book *Dhikr al-niswa al-muta'abbidat al-sufiyyat* (Memorial of Female Sufi Devotees). This is the first Sufi work devoted entirely to women. Sulami uses the figure of Rabi'a to introduce the concept of *ta'abbud* (literally, "making oneself into a slave of God"), which for him is the main characteristic of women's spirituality. As I have explained in the Introduction to my 1999

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[21] Ibid, 29

edition of Sulami's work, Sulami also uses the figure of Rabi'a to advocate a theology of servitude, which he viewed as foundational for the Sufi way in general.[22]

Sulami's Book of Sufi Women is significant as a historical source because it is the first extant work that mentions Rabi'a to cite chains of transmission for the stories and dicta that it contains. Some of the names in these chains of transmission are authors of written works that are now lost but would have been consulted by him. In addition to Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Burjulani mentioned above, Sulami also cites the names of other well-known authors of hagiographical or prosopographical works.[23] These include Ibrahim ibn al-Junayd of Baghdad (d. 883-4 CE), who, like Burjulani, wrote a work titled *Kitab al-ruhban*; Abu Sa'id ibn al-A'rabi of Basra (d. in Mecca, 952-3 CE), an important early Sufi who wrote a work of prosopography titled *Tabaqat al-nussak* (Generations of the Ascetic Ritualists); and Ja'far al-Khuldi of Baghdad (d. 959-60 CE), a famous Sufi and poet who wrote a hagiography titled *Hikayat al-awliya'* (Stories of the Saints).

The most important step in the transformation of the Rabi'a narratives into a master narrative was taken around the beginning of the thirteenth century CE. Before this time no work that mentioned Rabi'a had established itself as a model for subsequent narratives. Certain works, such as Makki's *Qut al-qulub* and Sulami's Book of Sufi Women, created important narrative tropes. In addition, there is some evidence that short works specifically devoted to Rabi'a were beginning to be written, such as a work by the Hanbali theologian Jamal al-Din Ibn al-Jawzi (1201 CE). However, none of the authors who mention Rabi'a from the tenth through the twelfth century CE was able to establish a model or paradigm for other works to follow. Since by this time Rabi'a had become recognized as an important figure of early Sufism, the lack of a *vita* or prior text for her hagiography is surprising.

All of this changed with the publication of Farid al-Din al-'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*. This is the most important work for the development of the Rabi'a myth. The story that 'Attar outlines in his chapter on Rabi'a has become the foundational text for subsequent narratives of Rabi'a's life. 'Attar's composition of a *vita* for Rabi'a marks the most important literary moment in the history of the Rabi'a myth. Because this *vita* has gained universal acceptance, no analysis of the Rabi'a myth is sufficient without reference to it. 'Attar did more than just provide a new version of the Rabi'a narrative: the details of Rabi'a's life that he outlines in her *vita* appear to have been created out of whole cloth. Virtually no tradition recounting the events he describes can be found in any previous work known today. For this reason, 'Attar's depiction of Rabi'a's life-story must be viewed as a work of the imagination, whose message lies in its meaning, not in its presentation of supposed "facts." In Chapter 5, I use Roland Barthes' concept of the "reality effect" to show how 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a exemplifies the power of verisimilitude to create its own reality. Next, using the Russian phenomenologist Aleksei Losev's theory of myth, I show how by adding an "outline" or back story to the tropes created by his Sufi and non-Sufi predecessors, 'Attar opened the way for the popularization of the Rabi'a myth and enabled an icon for Sufis to become an icon for all Muslims.

'Attar's contribution to the Rabi'a myth was particularly influential in medieval Egypt. The Egyptian hagiographers Shu'ayb al-Hurayfish (d. 1398 CE) and 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Munawi (d. 1621 CE) based their notices on Rabi'a on 'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* and mimicked some of his rhetorical techniques. Because of the overwhelming influence of 'Attar's work, no major changes to the Rabi'a narrative occurred until the twentieth century.

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[22] See Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 54-60.

[23] For a more detailed discussion of these authors and their works, see Ibid, 48-53.

The changes that took place in the modern period were stimulated by changes in the notions of factuality and objective knowledge brought about by the rise of historicism in the nineteenth century. In the middle of the twentieth century, other changes were introduced through the influence of Existentialist philosophy and the dramatic requirements of modern entertainment media. A number of historical works on Rabi'a appeared in Europe and the Arab world during this period. Several of these are discussed in the chapters below, when they raise issues that are relevant to the subject under consideration. However, two historical works deserve special attention because of their influence on the Rabi'a narrative as it developed in modern times. These are Margaret Smith's *Rabi'a the Mystic*, which was first published in 1928, and 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi's *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi* (The Martyr of Divine Love), which was first published in 1948.

In terms of her importance to the Rabi'a myth, Margaret Smith (1884-1970) has been as influential for the English-language tradition of works on Rabi'a as 'Attar has been for the Sufi tradition of the Rabi'a narrative. In other words, one could say with only slight exaggeration that Margaret Smith is the "English 'Attar." Smith wrote the first modern historical study of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. This work, *Rabi'a the Mystic A.D. 717-801 and Her Fellow Saints in Islam, Being the Life and Teachings of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya of Basra, Sufi Saint ca. A.H. 99-185, A.D. 717-801, Together with Some Account of the Place of Women in Islam*, has become the most widely read and influential work on Rabi'a in English or any other European language.[24] In fact, in translation it may be the most widely read book on Rabi'a in any language.

Because Smith's work has influenced the scholarship on Rabi'a in so many ways, I could not confine my discussion of it to a single chapter. Instead, I refer to Smith's contributions throughout this work. In many ways, the present study is built on the foundation of Smith's pioneering scholarship; in other ways, however, it critiques her scholarship. One of the most important differences between the present work and that of Smith is its initial premise: whereas Smith was concerned with uncovering the "real" or historical Rabi'a, I dispute the notion that the "real" Rabi'a can ever be represented in a way that could correspond to the historicist model. Thus, I am more concerned in this work with the *figural* Rabi'a— the Rabi'a of narrative and myth. Although Chapters 1, 2, and 4, are devoted to a discussion of the religious, social, and intellectual worlds that the "real" Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya might have occupied, the most that I can accomplish in these chapters is to fill in social and historical background for the *tropes* of Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, or Rabi'a the Sufi. There is no way to write ana empirical and objective history of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya with the source materials that currently exist. Thus, the only way to approach her in a valid historiographical manner is to focus on the history of how she has been represented in the master narratives and literary tropes that make up her myth.

When Margaret Smith wrote on Rabi'a in the early twentieth century, many of the sources that are available today were not available to her. One of the most important of these sources is Sulami's Book of Sufi Women. Without Sulami's work, much of the early

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[24] See Margaret Smith, *Rabi'a the Mystic A.D. 717-801 and Her Fellow Saints in Islam, Being the Life and Teachings of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya of Basra, Sufi Saint ca. A.H. 99-185, A.D. 717-801, Together with Some Account of the Place of Women in Islam* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1928). A reproduction of this work with the original title was published by The Rainbow Bridge in 1977. The most widely available edition today is idem, *Rabi'a: the Life and Work of Rabi'a and Other Women Mystics in Islam* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld Publications, 1994). Page references to Smith's work in this study will cite both of these editions and will be written as *Rabi'a* (Oneworld) and *Rabi'a* (Rainbow Bridge).

narrative tradition on Rabi'a would still be lost. Because of the discovery of such works, the twenty-first century scholar is in a position to come up with new insights about Rabi'a and the Rabi'a narratives that Smith was not able to make. In addition, Smith lived in an era in which the field of Islamic Studies was dominated by philological scholarship and historicism. Today one can build on this previous scholarship but go beyond it as well. The scholar of sainthood and sacred biography in Islam is now able to choose from a much greater variety of historiographical approaches.

However, Smith was also prone to certain biases that need to be identified for contemporary readers. For example, her work is full of Orientalist bias against what she believed to be the oppression of women in Islam. Another bias in Smith's work is her use of Christian spiritual practices as models for Islamic spiritual practices. This bias has become so prevalent in Sufi studies that it now constitutes a trope of its own. I argue in Chapter 2 that Smith overlooked the important ascetic discipline of ethical precaution (*wara'*) in her discussion of early Sufi ascetic practices because this discipline— which was more common among pagan philosophers and Jews than among early Christian ascetics— did not fit well in her Christian-inspired model of asceticism. Smith's over-reliance on Christian antecedents is apparent throughout the chapter on asceticism in *Rabi'a the Mystic*, where she even claims anachronistically that the ascetic poverty practiced by the earliest Sufis was the same as the Franciscan approach of St. Francis of Assisi and Brother Giles.[25]

The work that is most comparable in influence to Smith's *Rabi'a the Mystic* for Arabic-language readers is 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi's *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya the Martyr of Divine Love).[26] This work has been so influential for subsequent Arabic scholarship on Rabi'a that if Margaret Smith can be called the "English 'Attar," then Badawi can be called the "Arab 'Attar." 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi (1917-2002) is best known in the West as a scholar of Islamic philosophy. However, in the Arab world he was also famous as that region's most important Existentialist philosopher. Although Badawi's monograph on Rabi'a was written as a scholarly and historical work, in actuality it has more in common with 'Attar's quasi-novelistic attempt to construct the Rabi'a myth than with empirical historical studies. Because of its frequent use of creative license, some Arab scholars treat *Martyr of Divine Love* as an embarrassment: sometimes this work is not even listed as part of his bibliography.

Unlike Margaret Smith, who kept her speculations about Rabi'a within academic limits, Badawi felt free to add new and original plot elements to the Rabi'a narrative. As we shall see in Chapter 6, he portrays Rabi'a as an Existentialist. In doing so, he relied on the Existentialist concept of angst (Ar. *qalaq*) to portray her as an unquiet soul whose spirituality was part of a struggle to resolve inner conflicts and overcome traumatic life experiences. Basing his representation of Rabi'a on the Existentialism of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Badawi revised 'Attar's *vita* of Rabi'a, following Kierkegaard's three-stage model of personality development. To better fit this model, Badawi made up scenarios for Rabi'a's life that the Sufi 'Attar would never have imagined. Chief among these scenarios is the depiction of Rabi'a as a social rebel who turns to hedonism in response to her suffering. Drawing on the Christian tropes of the reformed sinner and "fallen woman" saint, Badawi also depicts Rabi'a as experiencing a dramatic, "Road to Damascus" conversion.

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[25] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 98-9 and (Rainbow Bridge), 74-5

[26] 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (Kuwait: Wakkalat al-Matbu'at, 1978 reprint of 1948 first edition)

Badawi's *Martyr of Divine Love* was the inspiration for the 1963 Egyptian movie *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*. This well-known and widely popular film chronicles Rabi'a's personal struggles, based on the Existentialist model of Rabi'a's life as interpreted by Badawi. Badawi's book also provided the inspiration for the Lebanese feminist author Widad El Sakkakini to write *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa* (The Sufi Lover), a quasi-novelistic biography of Rabi'a that was published in 1955.[27] This work, which is also discussed at length in Chapter 6, portrays Rabi'a in feminist terms.

III. A NOTE ON MYTH AND METHOD

I have already said quite a lot about my approach to narrative in the preceding pages, but what does it mean to say that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is a myth? What definition of myth do I use? Surprisingly, there is little consensus in modern scholarship on what the term, "myth," means. To use a pun coined by the folklorist Alan Dundes, it is easy to become a victim of "myth-taken identity."[28] On one side of the theoretical spectrum are folklorists, such as Dundes himself, who advocate a narrow definition of myth, in the belief that this is most scientific. For Dundes, "A myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form."[29] Unless these conditions are met, a narrative cannot be a myth. The term, "sacred narrative," implies that a myth is religious, unlike the folktale, which is secular. For Dundes, a myth is also about origins. Although he stresses that a myth's story of origins is true, this is largely because it serves a religious function, not because its contents are true. Dundes still holds to an empirical notion of truth: a myth is true because it is a story that serves a religious function; a folktale is fictional because it is just a story.

Following a tradition in folklore studies that goes back to the Brothers Grimm in the early nineteenth century, Dundes draws a distinction between three types of narrative: myths, legends, and folktales. These types correspond to the terms *Mythen, Sagen,* and *Märchen* in German, and the terms *mythes, traditions populaires,* and *contes populaires*, in French.[30] Dundes regards them as universal categories that are both analytic and ethnic because similar distinctions can also be found in many cultures. The difference between them depends on their content rather than on their form: whereas myths are sacred stories that talk about origins and folktales are "once-upon-a-time" stories and hence fictional, legends lie in-between.[31] Legends can be either sacred or secular; chronologically, they take place after the time of origins but before the present. Unlike myths, which discuss origins, legends discuss matters that are relevant to present-day concerns. However, they do not have the truth-value of myths. For Dundes, the stories of saints are legends, as are certain narrative tropes, such as the tropes of the Flying Dutchman or the Wandering Jew. Thus, he would not agree with the contention made in this work that the narratives of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya constitute a myth. As saint stories, they would be legends and the narrative tropes they use would be stories-within-a-story, as in novels, short stories, or other types of fictional narratives. To put it

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[27] Widad al-Sakkakini, *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (Damascus: Dar Tlas li-l-dirasat wa-l-tarjama wa-l-nashr, 1989 reprint of the 1955 Cairo first edition)

[28] Alan Dundes, *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1984), ix

[29] Ibid, 1

[30] See William Bascom, "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives," in Ibid, 25.

[31] Ibid, 5-6

another way, they are like the *Sagen* that were used as source materials by Richard Wagner for his operas.

A major problem with Dundes' division of narratives into myths, folktales, and legends is that it does not correspond to terminology used in the Arabic language, in which most of the Rabi'a narratives appear. For example, if one looks up the word "myth," in an English-Arabic dictionary, one finds something like the following definitions, which come from a well-known English-Arabic dictionary from Lebanon: *shakhs khurafi* (fictional person), *qissa khayaliyya* (imaginary story), *khurafa* (story or folktale), *talfiq* (falsification), *mayn* (falsehood), and *shakhsun la wujuda lahu* (nonexistent person).[32] These definitions are based on the common understanding of "myth" as an antonym for "fact," and the only narrative forms that are indicated are the legend and the folktale.

In Modern Standard Arabic, the term that is most commonly used for "myth" is *ustura* (pl. *asatir*). This term appears several times in the Qur'an, where it has two meanings, both of which appear in Sura 68, *al-Qalam* (The Pen). The first verse of this Sura states: "[The letter] *Nun* and the Pen, and that which they write" (*Nun wa al-qalam wa ma yasturun*) (Qur'an 68:1). Qur'an, 68:15 states: "When our verses are recited to him, he says: 'These are but tales of the ancients'" (*idh tutla 'alayhi ayatuna qala asatir al-awwalin*). In the first of these Qur'anic verses, the present-tense plural form of the verb *satara* refers to things that are written down (*ma yasturun*). In the second Qur'anic verse, the noun phrase *asatir al-awwalin* ("tales of the ancients") is equivalent to the legends or folktales of Dundes and the folklorists. The secondary meaning of this phrase connotes inaccuracy or falsehood.

The Qur'anic meaning of *ustura* is confirmed by the medieval Arabic dictionary *Lisan al-'Arab* (Language of the Arabs) by Jamal al-Din ibn Manzur (d. 1321 CE).[33] According to this dictionary, the cognate *astur* (pl. *astar* or *asatir*) originally referred to a line or a row of things, such as a row of trees. When applied to narratives, this term connotes a series of statements. The term *astur* also refers to a line of writing, as in the first verse of *Surat al-Qalam*. The phrase, *asatir al-awwalin*, in Qur'an 68:15 is defined by Ibn Manzur as "that which was written down by the ancients," or "a predicate with a missing subject" (*khabarun li-ibtida'in mahdhufin*). We can thus conclude from these dictionary entries that with respect to types of narratives, the Arabic term *ustura* refers in general to stories from the past with no clear origin. The definite plural form *al-asatir* is defined by Ibn Manzur as "falsehoods" (*al-abatil*) or "disordered reports or accounts" (*ahadith la nizama laha*). Thus, the overall connotation of *ustura* is of a group of false stories or narratives. This also corresponds to Dundes' definition of legends and folktales, but not of myths.

This evidence leads to the conclusion that the term "myth," as it is defined by Dundes, does not exist in Arabic. Medieval Arabs apparently talked about legends and folktales but not "myths." So what are we to make of this in light of Dundes' definition of myth? Are we to conclude that because the concept of myth as he defines it does not exist in Arabic, Arabs do not have myths? It is hard to see how such a conclusion could be justified. Just because an exact equivalent of the folklorists' definition of myth does not exist in Arabic, it does not mean that Arabs have no myths. We no longer live in a world where we can get away with treating another culture as impoverished just because it does not have an equivalent to one of our academic terms. However, because Dundes' definition of myth

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[32] Khalil Saadeh, *Saadeh's Dictionary* (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1974), vol. 2, 1032. This is a widely used dictionary by non-academic professionals in the Middle East.

[33] Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dar al-Sadir, reprint of 1883 first edition, n.d.), vol. 4, 363

arbitrarily ignores the semantic categories of a major culture, we can conclude that it is inadequate as a universal concept. Universalist definitions must apply in one way or another to every empirical case, not just to some of them. Clearly, we need a more inclusive definition of myth than Dundes and the folklorists are able to provide.

G. S. Kirk, a scholar of myth who was trained in Classics, reached the same conclusion about the folklorists' definition of myth. For Kirk, the formalistic view of myth used by folklorists is too narrow: "[They] tend to exclude *prima facie* blocs of mythological material for no particular reason. Moreover, they tell us little about the nature of myths themselves; they simply isolate, not very accurately, one characteristic."[34] Kirk proposes a more inclusive definition by characterizing myths as "dramatically constructed tales" that are passed down from antiquity and incorporated into tradition.[35] Even though myths may contain supernatural content, they are not necessarily religious or sacred. Even secular stories can be called myths. For Kirk, what is more important than the sacred character of myths is their popular appeal and openness to differences of interpretation.

> [A myth's] narrative core or plot must be such as to allow different emphases and interpretations according to different customs, needs, and preoccupations. In one sense, a myth is always changing; in another its narrative structure persists. Many traditional oral tales . . . are what we term folktales or *Märchen*. [However,] it is sensible not to deny these the general title of myths, since their themes interact with those of more imaginative and pregnant types.[36]

Most of the narratives about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya fit this description. The same might even be said of Farid al-Din al-'Attar's medieval *vita* of Rabi'a— that is, if one accepts his contention that the stories he relates are based on real traditions. In Kirk's definition of myth, form and function are interrelated. In other words, the form or structure of a story that is part of a myth is just as important, if not more important than its content. As Kirk states, "The continuing factor; the *hypoxeimenon* that receives the different qualities [of myth], is the narrative structure itself."[37]

Some of Kirk's insights about myth were known previously to scholars of Religious Studies. As early as 1954, Theodore H. Gaster defined myth as "any presentation of the actual in terms of the ideal."[38] This definition brings to mind Mircea Eliade's statement, mentioned earlier, that in mythical narratives, "the essential precedes existence." Because Eliade's writings on myth are so numerous and because he modified his views so often, there is not enough space to discuss them in detail here. In general terms, Eliade's definition of myth is similar to that of Alan Dundes.[39] However, he makes other observations that would seem to support the idea that the Rabi'a narratives also constitute a myth. For example, in

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[34] G. S. Kirk, "On Defining Myths," in Dundes, *Sacred Narrative*, 55 (reprinted from *Phronesis: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy*, suppl. Vol. 1 (1973), 61-69.

[35] Ibid, 56

[36] Ibid, 57-58

[37] Ibid, 58

[38] Theodore H. Gaster, "Myth and Story," in Ibid, 112; reprinted from *Numen*, 1 (1954), 184-212

[39] See, for example, Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (5-6): "Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled Time of the 'beginnings.' In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality— an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, and institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a "creation": it relates how something was produced, began to *be*. Myth tells of that which *really* happened, which manifested itself completely. The actors in myths are Supernatural Beings."

The Myth of the Eternal Return (1954), Eliade states that the repetition of paradigmatic or archetypal acts is a hallmark of myth. [40] Paradigmatic acts or gestures are common characteristics of what Eliade calls the "mythicization of historical personages." To illustrate this concept, he uses the example of the Serbian folk hero Marko Kraljevic: "His historical existence is unquestionable, and we even know the date of his death (1394). But no sooner is Marko's historical personality received into the popular memory than it is abolished and his biography is reconstructed in accordance with the norms of myth."[41] The same can be said of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Circumstantial evidence indicates that she actually existed and her approximate death-date is known. However, her biography as constructed by 'Attar and others is clearly more mythical than historical in the normal sense of the term.

For Eliade, the "mythicization of historical personages" is based on the image of ancient heroes. In Chapter 5, I discuss how 'Attar's iconic depiction of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya draws heavily on the mythical images of the Virgin Mary and the Prophet Muhammad's wife 'A'isha. Although some may debate whether these figures can be called "heroes," I would submit that as the paradigmatic female figures of Islam, the Virgin Mary, 'A'isha, and the Prophet's daughter Fatima are analogous to folk heroes. Today, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is included as the fourth of these paradigmatic women. In Eliade's terms, it is significant that the name *Rabi'a*, means "fourth" in Arabic. Whether by chance or by design, her name signifies her status as the fourth of the paradigmatic female figures of Islam. Given this correspondence, the following statement by Eliade on the figural relation between myth and the hero is relevant to Rabi'a's example:

> Myth is the last— not the first— stage in the development of a hero." But this only confirms the conclusion reached by many investigators (Caraman and others): the recollection of a historical event or a real personage survives in popular memory for two or three centuries at the utmost. This is because popular memory finds difficulty in retaining individual events and real figures. The structures by means of which [myth] functions are different: categories instead of events, archetypes instead of historical personages. The historical personage is assimilated to this mythical model (hero, etc.), while the event is identified with the category of mythical actions . . . If certain epic poems preserve what is called "historical truth," this truth almost never has to do with definite persons and events, but with institutions, customs, landscapes.[42]

To appreciate the relevance of these insights to the Rabi'a myth, one need only recall the statement made above that the development of Sufi narrative tropes about Rabi'a first occurred about 200 years after her death and that her *vita* was not composed until 400 years after her death. This corresponds to Eliade's observations about the limited duration of historical memory. Literary tropes and biographies do not become major parts of the repertoire of a myth until the memory of oral tradition begins to fade. Although Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is not an epic hero like the Slavic heroes discussed by Eliade, she clearly provides an example of what he calls "the mythicization of historical personages."

Eliade's view of myth also applies to the Rabi'a narratives when he talks about the reception of mythical stories by their audience. For example, in *Myth and Reality* (1963) he states: "What is involved is not a commemoration of mythical events but a reiteration of

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[40] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, Willard R. Trask, trans. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974 reprint of 1954 first edition), 34-36
[41] Ibid, 39-40
[42] Ibid, 43

them. The protagonists of the myth are made present, one becomes their contemporary. This also implies that one is no longer living in chronological time, but in the primordial Time, the time when the event *first took place*. This is why we can use the term the 'strong time' of myth; it is the prodigious, 'sacred' time when something *new, strong,* and *significant* was manifested."[43] The term, "reiteration," that Eliade uses in this passage recalls the literary techniques of repetition, adaptation, appropriation, and imitation— not to mention intertextuality— that have been used in the development of the Rabi'a narratives.

Furthermore, the fact that Rabi'a lived in the "strong time" of early Islam is fundamental to her mythical image. As discussed in Chapter 1, she is considered a member of *al-Salaf al-Salih*, the "Righteous Predecessors" of Islamic tradition, who set the spiritual paradigms for other Muslims to follow. In Sunni Islam, *al-Salaf al-Salih* are second only to the Prophet Muhammad as exemplars. This is why it is possible to hear a sermon on Rabi'a's spirituality in a Saudi-Wahhabi mosque as well as in Sufi gatherings. In the eyes of Saudi Muslims, her status as a Righteous Predecessor absolves her of the alleged doctrinal errors of the Sufis, who also include her as one of their own.[44]

Although Eliade occasionally discusses European saints and Indian yogis in his works on myth, to my knowledge he does not discuss Rabi'a or any figure that is fully comparable to her. Instead of tropes, he talks about "clichés."[45] And when he discusses history, it is not in the way that history is conceived here; instead, he contrasts history negatively with more "primordial" worldviews. However, his willingness to consider the legends of heroes as myths points the way to a broader definition of myth that is suitable for the present study. When I refer to myth in this study, I follow the definition proposed by Robert A. Segal, a well-known American scholar of myth who is even cited approvingly by Alan Dundes.[46] The basic elements of Segal's definition of myth are as follows:[47]

1. *A myth is a story about something significant.* Segal does not specify in detail what myths are about because rigid definitions inevitably cause trouble. For example, if a myth is only about creation as Dundes and the folklorists would have it, then most of the stories in the Bible other than the Book of Genesis would be legends or folktales, not myths. Since this would be absurd, says Segal, it is best to retain as broad a defintion of myth as possible. This broad definition also applies to the time of myths: a mythical story can take place in the past, the present, or the future. In addition, myths can include beliefs or credos, such as the American "rags to riches" myth. In the present study, Segal's "credos" are treated as part of the category of narrative tropes.

2. *The main figures of myths are personalities, whether divine, human, or animal.* Mythical personalities can be either the agents or the objects of actions. If only divine agents were the protagonists of myths, then the point made above about the Bible would apply here

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[43] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 19; the italics are Eliade's.

[44] In the 1990s, I once heard a Friday sermon based on Rabi'a's teachings at a Saudi-sponsored mosque in Washington, D.C. The Imam who gave the sermon was appointed by the Saudi government.

[45] See, for example, Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 117, where he speaks of Indian narrative tropes or "clichés" that make the philosophical concept of the self more intelligible to uneducated audiences.

[46] Robert A. Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, U. K.: Oxford University Press, 2004). On the back cover, Dundes endorses this work as "a concise, elegant, erudite overview of the major nineteenth and twentieth century theories of myth."

[47] Segal's definition of myth is summarized in Ibid, 4-6.

as well. Such a narrow definition of myth would exclude not only most of the Bible but also the Qur'an, since God is not always the direct agent in biblical or Qur'anic narratives.

3.   *The function of a myth is weighty: the myth accomplishes something significant for its adherents.* Segal leaves the meaning of this statement open-ended on purpose. He does not specify what such an accomplishment should entail in order to include as many varieties as possible.

4.   *To qualify as a myth, a story— which may convey a conviction— must be held tenaciously by its adherents.* In this part of his definition, Segal avoids the question of whether a myth is true or false. This is because one is on the horns of a dilemma no matter where one stands on this issue. If a myth is deemed to be false, then one is open to the accusation of being a crude empiricist. If a myth is deemed to be true, then one has to specify in what way or context it is true; this creates its own problems because every qualification can provoke a rebuttal. For Segal, it is immaterial to the concept of myth whether one believes in God or holds a clearly erroneous conviction, such as the belief that Elvis Presley is still alive. What is important to myth is that it is tenaciously believed, that it is based on a story that says something significant about a personality, and that it is also significant in some way to its adherents.

If someone were to object that in Segal's definition, a wide variety of narrative types could be called myths, he would reply that this is precisely the point. Because of the wide variety of narratives that function as myths in human cultures, any definition of myth that aspires to universality should be as inclusive as possible. To be inclusive, a definition of myth must also be minimalist rather than maximalist in its stipulations. Otherwise, cultural expressions that are unique to certain societies might be arbitrarily excluded. When theories are derived from the widest possible variety of data, rather than being the product only of an academic subculture, pragmatic considerations come to the fore. Robert A. Segal's inclusive and minimalist definition of myth is the result of a long career of studying myths comparatively. If it appears less rigorous on the surface than other definitions of myth, this is because experience has taught him that narrow definitions of myth are inadequate in practice and that comprehensiveness demands flexibility. This is why I find Segal's definition of myth attractive. Not only does it allow me to discuss the development of the Rabi'a narratives as part of a mythmaking process, but Segal arrived at his definition of myth for the same reason that I turned to literary theory as a supplement to traditional methods of historical and Religious Studies inquiry: because the evidence warrants it.

Before concluding this section, I must say a few additional words about method. I do not want to belabor the point, because by now it should be apparent that theories of myth, along with historiographical methods based on the so-called "linguistic turn," are appropriate tools of analysis for this study. I also feel that in the preceding pages, I have made sufficient arguments for the relevance of literary theory and theories of narrative. However, in case some doubt still remains, I should reiterate that in the way that I use them, the theoretical approaches mentioned above are *tools*, not ideologies. Unlike some colleagues in Religious Studies, I do not believe in post-modernism or the linguistic turn as articles of faith. To give but one example: in Chapter 4, I critique Elizabeth A. Clark's use of Barthes' concept of the "reality effect" as going too far by denying empirical reality to rhetorically constructed narratives. When I approach such narratives, I do so pragmatically, like a contractor contemplating the construction of a new house or renovation project. I assess the problems of truth and method that lie before me and try to find (metaphorically) the best subcontractors and tools for the job. When it comes to my toolbox, I want it to contain the greatest number

of useful tools as possible. Sometimes traditional tools work best; at other times, however, it may be necessary to go "high-tech," so to speak.

My use of the construction metaphor follows Jonathan Potter in his book, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric, and Social Construction* (1996). Although I am not a specialist in the sociology of scientific knowledge or conversation analysis as Potter is, I have found his pragmatic and constructivist view of knowledge very helpful in framing the present study. Potter's approach to the representation of reality is based on two premises: (1) descriptions and accounts *construct* versions of the world; and (2) these descriptions and accounts are *themselves* constructed.[48] As Potter describes this perspective, it "suggests the possibility of assembly, manufacture, the prospect of different structures as an end point, and the likelihood that different materials will be used in the fabrication. It emphasizes that descriptions are human practices and that descriptions could have been otherwise."[49] He goes on to explain, "Reality enters into human practices by way of the categories and descriptions that are part of those practices. The world is not ready categorized by God or nature in ways that we are all forced to accept. It is *constituted* in one way or another as people talk it, write it, and argue it."[50]

Potter's view of the relationship between reality and constructed practices of discourse is a handy perspective from which to approach the study of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya from narrative to myth. As described above, *everything* that we know about Rabi'a is a product of construction. As Potter states, constructivist models can be useful because they enable us to ask questions of the data that we could not ask if we used another metaphor. As Potter puts it, "If we treat descriptions as constructions and constructive, we can ask how they are put together, what materials are used, what sorts of things or events are produced by them, and so on."[51] He goes on to argue that in using this approach as an analytical tool, we do not need to get sidetracked by engaging in abstract philosophical discussions of what sorts of things exist and what their status is. "Instead, these [pragmatic] arguments about metaphors are intended to clear the way for a focus on practical and analytic issues. Indeed, the abstract formulation of this problem can be positively misleading because it focuses on the relation between a description and 'reality' in the abstract, rather than considering the sorts of practices in which descriptive discourse operates."[52]

A common theme of my use of literary theorists like Barthes, White, Losev, and others is that they all use constructivist models of discourse in one way or another. I do not necessarily accept everything that they have to say. I take what I need from their theories and leave the rest. One can argue about which theories of construction to use, but it is very difficult to argue against the appropriateness of this metaphor to the study of the Rabi'a narratives. Excluding this approach on ideological grounds would not be true to the sources on Rabi'a that exist. However, this is not to say that a constructivist model necessarily works best for the study of every Muslim saint. For example, in cases where a saint has left a legacy of personal writings, such as with the Sufi master 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani of Baghdad (d. 1166 CE), the situation changes significantly. The existence of a body of writings adds a level of empirical objectivity to the question of who the "real" person is that cannot be found in the

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[48] Jonathan Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric, and Social Construction* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2012 reprint of 1996 first edition), 97

[49] Ibid, 97-98

[50] Ibid, 98

[51] Ibid

[52] Ibid

sources associated with Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. The question of who the "real" Rabi'a was cannot be answered objectively; however, the question of who the "real" 'Abd al-Qadir was can be answered, at least to a certain extent. In such cases, the wider variety of available information dictates that other theoretical approaches should be explored.

The situation is similar with respect to historiography. In this study, I rely rather heavily on Hayden White's theory of tropes and his concept of "the content of the form" in historical writing. However, as with my use of Potter's constructivist approach, this does not mean that I adhere to White's theories ideologically or that "anything goes." Scholars who write about Hayden White, including some of his followers, often make the mistake of assuming that because White uses concepts like "the fictions of factual representation," he does not believe in objective historical facts. This could not be further from the truth. In his book, *The Content of the Form*, White explains that history writing and fiction writing start from different premises: "What distinguishes 'historical' from 'fictional' stories is first and foremost their content, rather than their form. The content of historical stories is *real events, events that really happened, rather than imaginary events, events invented by the narrator . . . The form of the discourse, the narrative . . . is a simulacrum of the structure and process of real events . . . and insofar as it is an accurate imitation, it is to be considered a truthful account thereof.*"[53]

In other words, if the form of historical writing reflects the tropes and metaphors of fictional writing, this does not necessarily mean that the content of historical narratives is not factual. What White means to stress is that the form of narrative can affect the representation of facts and events in historical writing, such that the representation creates new figural content that shapes how these facts and events are considered by readers. This is what White means by "the content of the form," and it is particularly important in the representation of iconic historical figures, such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, King Mohammed V of Morocco, or Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. However, the difference between Rabi'a and these other iconic figures is that historians who write about Washington, Lincoln, and King Mohammed V have other sources of historical information at their disposal that do not depend on literary representation. With Rabi'a this is not the case. Thus, her representation in narratives is heavily dependent on the form or way in which she is represented. Since all evidence of Rabi'a is literary, in such an extreme case, the content of what we know about her is virtually indistinguishable from the narrative form in which she is depicted.

IV. THE PLAN OF THIS WORK

Rabi'a from Narrative to Myth: The Tropics of Identity of a Muslim Woman Saint is a work of Religious Studies, but it is also a work of history. The purpose of this work is to trace the representation of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya of Basra (ca. 717-801 CE) through narrative to master narrative and myth by studying the tropes that have come to define her identity. As mentioned above, four major narrative tropes define Rabi'a as an exemplary figure. These are Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, Rabi'a the Lover, and Rabi'a the Sufi. However, Rabi'a is more to Muslims than just an exemplary figure: she is also revered as a saint. Thus, another narrative trope must be added to this list: Rabi'a the Icon. As an iconic figure, Rabi'a is primarily a literary icon rather than a visual icon because until the twentieth century her

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[53] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 27, my italics; on the "fictions of factual representation," see idem, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 121-134.

image appeared only in the written word and in the imagination of the reader. However, it is appropriate to consider her an icon because her recollection evokes multiple narratives connected with the name, "Rabi'a," just as a painted icon evokes a variety of narratives that are associated with a single, stylized image.[54] The metaphor of the icon is even more appropriate for Rabi'a now that she has become the subject of two motion pictures, numerous songs in different languages, and at least one television mini-series.

The chapters in this work will discuss each of the above narrative tropes in order, culminating in the trope of Rabi'a the Icon. Chapter 1, "Rabi'a the Teacher," is the first of three historical chapters in this study. I call these chapters "historical" in comparison with the "literary" chapters of this study because in them I try to sketch the historical and cultural environments in which the "real" Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya would have lived. When I first began this study, I did not believe that I would find any historical evidence of Rabi'a worthy of the name. Her mythical image is so powerful that it seems to obscure any trace of a real person. However, after reviewing the earliest references to Rabi'a in the works of Muhasibi, Jahiz, and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, and the traces of reports about her by Burjulani, Ibn al-A'rabi, al-Khuldi and others, I began to believe that a real person did in fact lie behind the Rabi'a narratives, even if little was visible except her name.

Realizing that a clear picture of the historical Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya could not be drawn from empirical historical methods, I thought it best to discuss the types of spiritual and moral education, asceticism, and Proto-Sufism that were current in her time, hoping that this would shed indirect light on the woman of the Arab clan of 'Adi ibn Qays who provided the inspiration for what would become the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. As I discuss in the Conclusion, this method is comparable to studying a palimpsest, in which one finds the faint trace of an earlier work beneath a more legible later work. Perhaps more appropriately, it is also like finding the impression of lost writing on a manuscript page below the page where the image was originally drawn. One can find such a lost image by rubbing a pencil lightly across the surface of the bottom page so that the impression faintly appears. In a similar way, in this study I try to reveal the lost image of the historical Rabi'a by sketching in the cultural, intellectual, and religious environments of Basra and the early Islamic world of her time.

Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of the earliest sources of information on Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Besides discussing the writers mentioned in the first part of the Introduction in greater detail, this section also discusses the genre of *tabaqat* ("levels" or "generations") literature in which most of the early sources on Rabi'a are found. Next, I discuss the students and associates of Rabi'a that are named in these early works. After this, I attempt to sketch a rough picture of Rabi'a of Basra as she appears in the earliest sources. In this section of the chapter, I come to the following conclusions about the "real" Rabi'a: (1) She was an Arab, not a Persian or Aramaic inhabitant of early Islamic Iraq. (2) She was most likely not a slave but a free woman of considerable standing in her clan and tribe. (3) She was an early Sunni Muslim and not from a dissident sect such as the Shi'a or Kharijites. (4) She was noted in her community for her wisdom and eloquence.

Further developing this last point, I discuss Jahiz's description of Rabi'a as a person of *bayan*. For Jahiz, using this appellation meant that Rabi'a was known for the rhetorical quality of her teachings and her ability to make clear and effective arguments. In this section

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[54] Instead of using the term, "icon," the Dutch historiographer Frank R. Ankersmit refers to "*proper names* of narrative substances (i.e., of views or representations of the past, or . . . of a common denominator to be discerned in a number of roughly comparable representations)." See idem, *Historical Representation* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 57.

of the chapter, I discuss what this depiction of Rabi'a meant in the intellectual culture of late Umayyad and early Abbasid Iraq. I describe the aphoristic pedagogy attributed to Rabi'a and show how this pedagogy had its roots in late-antique Stoicism. Next, I turn to Rabi'a's purported student Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 778 CE), and how traditions show unusual unanimity in associating Thawri with her. Because Thawri's personality is an important part of these traditions, I describe how historical and prosopographical sources describe his life and character. Based on these sources, I conclude that Thawri could only have known Rabi'a in the last three years of his life, when he was hiding out as a political dissident in Basra.

In the last part of Chapter 1, I discuss how in early Islam the concept of the person of culture meant more than just the etiquette or literary eloquence that it means today. In Rabi'a's time, this concept was related to the concept of *ta'dib*, "character formation." This is the sense in which Rabi'a is depicted in the early sources as a *mu'addiba*: she is depicted as a teacher, trainer, and molder of character. As an ethical discipline, *ta'dib* was concerned with mental discipline and the formation of noble qualities of mind and soul. *Ta'dib* was also related to the virtues of *muruwwa*, "manly" or mature comportment, and *hilm*, rational judgment derived from reason and experience. Much like the Stoic teacher of late antiquity, Rabi'a the Teacher — whatever else she may have been— is remembered as a moral and ethical mentor and exemplar.

Chapter 2, "Rabi'a the Ascetic," discusses Rabi'a as an exemplar of Sufi asceticism. As part of the background to this chapter, I propose a new theoretical approach to early Islamic asceticism. In doing so, I draw on recent theoretical discussions of asceticism, comparative studies of asceticism, and works that provide new insights into asceticism in late antiquity, early Christianity, and early rabbinic Judaism. To my knowledge, none of this material has been used before in the study of Sufism.

At the beginning of the chapter, I frame my discussion of Rabi'a the Ascetic in terms of the "World/Nonworld Dichotomy," a model developed by the Belgian anthropologist Jacques Maquet. Maquet depicts the Nonworld is an alternative worldview that is conceived as a form of liberation from the economic and social constraints of normal life. This view of asceticism is valuable as a model for the study of Rabi'a and other ascetics of early Islam because it enables us to see them as a counterculture. Because the World/Nonworld Dichotomy is depicted in the Qur'an, early Muslim ascetics did not have to go beyond the literal meaning of the Qur'an to justify their practices.

The second section of Chapter 2 discusses the problem of asceticism as a theoretical category in Religious Studies. Here I draw on Pierre Hadot's observation that asceticism is both a philosophy and a way of life. This view of asceticism allows one to make a connection between the ascetic practices of Sufis and non-Sufi ascetics, such as Khariji and Hanbali pietists. It also helps explain why later Sufi writers, looking back on early Islam, tended to consider all famous ascetics as Sufis or potential Sufis, even though this was inaccurate. After noting the lack of a common theoretical language for the study of asceticism in general, I discuss new methodological approaches to asceticism such as Gavin Flood's work on the ascetic self and Catherine Bell's work on ritual practices. I argue that the systematic study of asceticism in early Islam must begin by avoiding anachronistic approaches (whether from Sufi hindsight or postmodern theories), and should focus instead on the terminological distinctions that were important to early ascetics themselves.

Following my own advice, in the next section of Chapter 2 I discuss the key terms of early Islamic asceticism. Three types of ascetic practice were prominent in this period: *zuhd* (renunciation, or asceticism in general), *wara'* (moral or ethical precaution), and *nusk* (ascetic ritualism, which includes extreme ritualistic behaviors and the practice of asceticism as a

vocation). A more problematical term is *faqr* (poverty). Although the term *faqir* ("poor one") has long been a synonym for *Sufi*, the intentional cultivation of poverty does not seem to have been as important for early Islamic ascetics as it was for early Christian ascetics. Many of the extreme ascetics that appear in early Islamic sources were ascetic ritualists, who were exceptions to the normal rule. I argue that in early Islamic asceticism moderation was the general rule, just as it was for Islam as a whole. When one takes the full variety of the practices of early Islamic ascetics into account, it appears that a life of poverty was a byproduct of asceticism rather than a required method. Although poverty was common, it was viewed as a material fact of life. In this early period, patience was more important as an ascetic practice than poverty.

In this chapter I make a theoretical distinction, originally drawn from the work of the scholar of Judaism Eliezer Diamond, between *instrumental asceticism* and *essential asceticism*. Instrumental asceticism, which is exemplified in early Islam by the *nasik* or ascetic ritualist, is a form of renunciation that is practiced in pursuit of instrumental goals. By contrast, essential asceticism is an inward imperative that causes the ascetic to view renunciation as governing every aspect of her life. For the essential ascetic, renunciation needs no instrumental goal because it is fully integrated into the path of piety; in other words, it is a way of life. With respect to the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic, the earliest sources most often depict her as an essential ascetic rather than as an instrumental ascetic.

The next section of Chapter 2 discusses women's asceticism in eighth-century Basra. Building on research first conducted for my 1998 book *Early Sufi Women*, I argue that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was not the founder, but the last major figure of a tradition of women's asceticism in Basra that went back more than a century before her. The origins of this tradition can be traced to the Prophet Muhammad's widow 'A'isha (d. 678 CE), who lived in Basra and practiced asceticism at the end of her life. The first major figure of this tradition was Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya (d. 702 CE), a member of Rabi'a's clan who was a servant of 'A'isha. Textual evidence indicates that Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya formulated the theology of servitude (*ta'abbud*) that Sulami saw as representative of Rabi'a's spirituality. However, the circle of ascetics associated with Rabi'a differed from Mu'adha and her students in that they were practitioners of essential asceticism instead of instrumental asceticism.

At the end of Chapter 2, I discuss a third major type of asceticism in Rabi'a's time: *reactionary asceticism*. This type of asceticism was a form of protest against the unequal distribution of wealth in Abbasid society. This is a major theme of the recently discovered *Kitab al-zuhd* (The Book of Renunciation) by Mu'afa ibn 'Imran of Mosul (d. 801 CE), who was Rabi'a's contemporary. Reactionary asceticism can also be considered a form of instrumental asceticism because it too was focused on a specific goal: the rejection and transformation of a materialistic society. However, the asceticism of Rabi'a was very different from this. In the asceticism associated with the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic, outward practices of asceticism are subordinated to their inner meaning. I argue that since the practice of essential asceticism is more an approach to God than a rejection of the world, it foreshadows the Love mysticism for which Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was to become most famous.

Chapter 3, "Rabi'a the Lover," is the first "literary" chapter of this study. Although every chapter of this work is both literary and historical, in the trope of Rabi'a the Lover it is impossible to separate the "real" Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya from her figural persona. As noted above, this trope was created by the Sufi theorist Abu Talib al-Makki. Eventually, it would become the most important narrative trope of the Rabi'a myth. In the twentieth century, partly through the influence of Margaret Smith's validation of Makki's representation, the

trope of Rabi'a the Lover would get a new lease on life in the writings of poets, songwriters, and screenwriters, some of them in the West. Today, the figural reality of Rabi'a the Lover is the only reality that matters for many of her devotees.

Chapter 3 begins with a theoretical discussion of the relation between the concepts of asceticism and the love of God. I argue that Rabi'a's reputation for asceticism was not as far removed from her reputation as a Love mystic as might be imagined. I show how an emphasis on the love of God follows directly from the essential asceticism that Rabi'a the Ascetic is depicted as practicing. In order to support this assertion, I demonstrate that Rabi'a was not the first to combine asceticism with a doctrine of Love in Islam. First of all, the concept of Love is prominent in Qur'an and Hadith. Second, just as Basra was the home of a long line of women ascetics, it was also the home of other ascetics— both men and women— who spoke about the love of God in their teachings. I also discuss the Love mysticism of some of the women ascetics of the Basra region. Prominent among them was Hayyuna of the port town of al-Ubulla near Basra, who may have been the "real" Rabi'a's teacher.

In the next section of Chapter 3, I discuss the question of Rabi'a's celibacy. Although some writers have claimed that Rabi'a was married and then widowed, she is identified as a celibate in the early work of Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur. Unlike in the Islamic world today, in Rabi'a's time celibacy was a common ascetic practice. In this regard, I propose a new way to think about celibacy as a form of asceticism. I separate celibacy into two types: *principled celibacy* and *vocational celibacy*. Principled celibacy is a form of celibacy that is based on scriptural foundations and is seen as fundamental to ascetic practice in general. This is the type of celibacy that is practiced in Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity. By contrast, vocational celibacy is based on individual choice and views marriage and children as impediments to the ascetic's main vocation, which is service to God. This type of celibacy is practiced in Islam and rabbinic Judaism. It is also related to essential asceticism because married life is seen as a distraction from God.

A major part of Chapter 3 is devoted to a discussion of the figural similarity between the trope of Rabi'a the Lover and Plato's discussion of Love in *The Symposium*. I argue that the Sufi portrayal of Rabi'a as a teacher of the higher forms of love is similar to Plato's portrayal of the priestess Diotima of Mantinaea, who teaches Socrates the mysteries of higher love in *The Symposium*. I trace the concept of "Rabi'a the Muslim Diotima" primarily through the writings of Abu Talib al-Makki and Farid al-Din al-'Attar. Using a term coined by Dimitri Gutas, I argue that the figure of Diotima is an "incognito presence" in Sufi depictions of Rabi'a. Although no complete copy of Plato's *Symposium* in Arabic has ever been found, references to this work are fairly common in early medieval Islamic literature. Following the late scholar of Arabic literature Ihsan Abbas, I suggest that the popularity of *The Symposium* in Abbasid court circles around the time of Rabi'a's death may have led to the appropriation of Diotima as a trope in accounts about Rabi'a from Makki onward. This section concludes with a detailed comparison between Plato's figural depiction of Diotima and Sufi depictions of Rabi'a the Lover.

In the last part of Chapter 3, I discuss two of the most famous love poems attributed to Rabi'a, the "Poem of the Two Loves" and the "Poem of the Intimate Gift." The Poem of the Two Loves was first attributed to Rabi'a by Makki to establish her reputation as a lover of God. However, after Makki, some Sufis attributed this poem to other authors besides Rabi'a. In the second part of this section, I argue that The Poem of the Intimate Gift, which originally came from the Syrian Sufi tradition, could not have been composed by Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. If it was composed by any early Sufi, it was most likely composed by Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Damascus, who died about 40 years after Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. I conclude this chapter with

some transitional observations on how Love mysticism relates to the Sufi concept of the knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*).

Chapter 4 is based on the question, "What does it mean to say 'Rabi'a the Sufi?'" I argue that it is anachronistic to answer this question by projecting back later definitions of Sufism onto the past. This has been done not only by modern writers on Sufism, but also by premodern Sufis themselves. Indeed, much of the history of early Sufism as we know it today is the result of later Sufi theorists projecting their concepts back onto earlier periods. Thus, in order to avoid anachronism, one must change this focus and ask more concretely: "What was a 'Sufi' in Rabi'a's time?" To answer this question, I examine references to the earliest figures called "Sufis" in the works of Jahiz, in Muhasibi's *Kitab al-makasib* (The Book of Outcomes), and in Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani's (d. 1037 CE) *Hilyat al-awliya'* (The Adornment of the Saints). In the *Hilya*, I concentrate on reports of Rabi'a's contemporaries transmitted by the earliest chroniclers of the Sufi tradition. I focus on two figures in particular because of the relatively large amount of information available on them: Abu Hashim al-Sufi of Kufa (d. ca. 776 CE) and Salih ibn 'Abd al-Jalil (fl. ca. 775 CE) of Kufa and Basra.

Based on the information available about these figures, I conclude that the meaning of the term "Sufi" in Rabi'a's time revolved around a specific set of attitudes and practices. I call this "Proto-Sufism" because institutionalized Sufism— as indicated by the use of the term *madhhab*, "method," in Sufi works of the late tenth century— had not yet been developed. Six characteristics defined the Proto-Sufism of Rabi'a's time: (1) a worldview governed by the World/Nonworld dichotomy; (2) a spiritual discipline based on the pursuit of both outward and inward purity; (3) an ascetic practice characterized by ascetic ritualism; (4) social practices characterized by ascetic moralism and spiritual and ethical training; (5) a critical attitude toward ordinary life; (6) the internalization of ascetic practice through essential asceticism and/or Love mysticism. I argue that the most important difference between the Proto-Sufism of Rabi'a's time and the Sufism of later periods was that whereas later Sufi doctrine was focused on the internalization of theological concepts, Proto-Sufism was conceived almost entirely in terms of practice.

The second section of Chapter 4 discusses the metaphor of the heart in early Sufism. It opens with an examination of the heart as a metaphor in the Qur'an, the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament. A comparison of these texts shows a common understanding of the heart as the spiritual core of the human being and the seat of the morals and the conscience. Early Eastern Christian writings in particular speak of the heart in ways that are evocative of Sufi teachings. In this section, I focus on the writings of St. Isaac of Nineveh (fl. ca. 680 CE), who flourished in the same region where Rabi'a lived. The use of the heart as a metaphor was common among early Muslim ascetics in the region of Basra, where modern scholars have traced it to the school of al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728 CE) and especially to his student Malik ibn Dinar (d. 745 CE). At least one of Rabi'a's female contemporaries is mentioned in Sufi sources as Ibn Dinar's student, and it is not inconceivable that Rabi'a herself may have met him. I suggest that if this indeed occurred, Rabi'a's association with Ibn Dinar may have been behind the erroneous accounts of her companionship with al-Hasan al-Basri.

I also discuss two other figures that transmitted Ibn Dinar's teachings and were contemporaries of Rabi'a and her associates. These are Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d. 830 CE) and his disciple Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari (d. 845 CE). These early Sufis were influential in spreading the doctrines of Proto-Sufism from Basra to Syria, Egypt, and Khurasan. Before he moved to Syria, Darani was reported to have associated with Rabi'a's disciple Maryam of Basra and may have met Rabi'a herself. Ahmad ibn Abi Hawari was the husband of Rabi'a

bint Isma'il of Damascus, who is often confused with Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in later works. Darani was one of the most important specialists in the doctrine of the heart in early Sufism. I argue that his theory of the heart may reflect the teachings of Rabi'a and her circle. The metaphors that Darani uses to discuss the heart are closely related to the concept of essential asceticism. These metaphors include the "preoccupation" of the heart, the "condition" of the heart, and the "knowledge" of the heart. In his Book of Sufi Women, Sulami mentions a group of people that he calls "masters of hearts" (*arbab al-qulub*). I suggest that Darani belonged to this group.

Chapter 4 concludes by discussing the Sufi concept of knowledge (*ma'rifa*). I argue that a common theme that emerges out of all the early works that mention Rabi'a, both Sufi and non-Sufi, is that she is a woman of knowledge and a knower of God. The trope of Rabi'a the Knower runs like a thread through all of the narrative tropes about Rabi'a in the premodern period, from Rabi'a the Teacher, to Rabi'a the Ascetic, Rabi'a the Lover, to Rabi'a the Sufi. Drawing on the works of scholars of early and medieval Christianity, I argue that Rabi'a's reputation for knowledge is what led male Sufi writers such as 'Attar to claim that she should be regarded as a man rather than as a woman. It was her knowledge as well that allowed Sulami to portray her as the quintessential Sufi woman. Combined with the ascetic traditions that she inherited from her male and female predecessors, the wisdom that she displayed through her integration of knowledge and practice allowed her to be seen not only as a Sufi woman but also as a paradigmatic Sufi in general.

Chapters 5 and 6, which discuss the trope of Rabi'a the Icon, return to the "literary" aspect of this study. Chapter 5, "Rabi'a the Icon (I): The Sufi Image," discusses the transformation of the four previous master narratives of Rabi'a into a myth through the influence of the *vita* composed at the end of the twelfth century CE by Farid al-Din al-'Attar. This chapter opens with a discussion of how Roland Barthes' concept of the "reality effect" is relevant to the study of the Rabi'a narratives. Using Barthes' terminology, I argue that "referential illusions" in these narratives helped create the Rabi'a myth by allowing the "paper time" of myth to replace the "chronological time" of history. I also discuss how Barthes agrees with Hayden White in demonstrating that the form of a narrative can create new narrative content that supersedes conventional notions of time and reality. Next, I contrast Barthes' and White's literary approach to history with Thomas J. Heffernan's approach to sacred biography, which views hagiographical works as documents rather than as literature. I argue that the literary approach is better suited for the analysis of the Rabi'a myth because it allows us to see how hagiography can create public opinion about a saint rather than just reflect it. As Barthes demonstrates, with myths such as that of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, objectively verifiable truth is largely irrelevant. Because narrative tropes are used to create referential illusions, verisimilitude is all that matters.

Besides comparing Barthes' theories with those of Hayden White, I also compare his work on myth with that of the Russian philosopher and historian Aleksei Fyodorovich Losev (1893-1988). Losev approaches the subject of myth dialectically like Barthes, but his basis for analysis is phenomenological rather than linguistic. For Losev, when a person becomes a mythical figure, she is not only a literary representation; she is also an idealized image or "pictorial emanation." This idealized image or "face" of the subject becomes the reality of her myth over time. With the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, the idealized image created by the narrative tropes discussed in this study express a "face" or image of Rabi'a that is taken for reality, no matter what the objective "facts" of her historical persona might be. According to Losev's theory of myth, the "faces" of Rabi'a that emerge from hagiography, public opinion, and local knowledge interact dialectically to create the iconic image of Rabi'a that is

perceived as her "true" identity. Since a mythological persona is created out of a combination of form, image, visage, and outline, this persona is an *icon*, which is memorialized through the narrative form of myth. Hence, following Losev's formulation, I refer to the mythological Rabi'a in Chapters 5 and 6 as "Rabi'a the Icon."

Chapter 5 is devoted to an examination of Rabi'a the Icon in the *vita* of Rabi'a composed by Farid al-Din al-'Attar. 'Attar's emplotment of Rabi'a's life story is teleological and the meaning it conveys is theological. As expressed by Jean Annestay, a contemporary French writer on Rabi'a, 'Attar attempts to convey the "principial" meaning of Rabi'a as a mythological figure of Sufism. Because of the influence of 'Attar's narrative, even today writers continue to depict what they see as Rabi'a's "principial" form. I explain that although 'Attar did not make a painting of Rabi'a, he nonetheless created an icon of her because the *vita* or life story that he wrote amounted to painting her image in words. To illustrate this, I examine the opening paragraphs of the chapter on Rabi'a in 'Attar's *Memorial of the Saints'*, showing how he sets up the story of Rabi'a by presenting her image in the form of an iconic tableau. Important "scenes" of this tableau include 'Attar's comparison of Rabi'a with the Virgin Mary and his depiction of her as an honorary "man." Following the historian of early Christianity Karen King, I argue that 'Attar's depiction of Rabi'a does not indicate a high valuation of femininity. This is because when the ideal of spirituality is seen as male or non-gendered, gender and sexuality— especially with respect to women— are given an inferior valuation. Also related to this point is 'Attar's conflation of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene when he compares Rabi'a to "Mary the Pure." Again following King, I argue that the trope of the virgin mother, because it implies a denial of female sexuality, reinforces women's subordination to men. Overall, 'Attar's depiction of Rabi'a is ambiguous. Because he compares her not only to Mary, but also compares her implicitly to Jesus and Moses, he seems to have thought of her as having a quasi-prophetic status. This creates a contradiction that 'Attar never resolves in his narrative.

After discussing the Introduction to 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a, I next discuss his emplotment of Rabi'a's life-story. As Losev states in his theory of myth, every visage needs an "outline" in order to fumction effectively. I argue that 'Attar creates such an outline by making up the missing details of Rabi'a's life in order to provide a narrative context for her sainthood. I call 'Attar's *vita* of Rabi'a a "just-so story" because the form in which it is presented indicates that he wanted it to be taken as true. Unlike Sulami, who provides chains of transmission for his accounts about Rabi'a, 'Attar presents his information as if it came from traditions that everyone knows: such traditions are to be treated as authentic simply because they are allegedly old.

In the remainder of Chapter 5, I discuss the most important plot elements of 'Attar's *vita* of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. These plot elements include the story of her childhood, including her birth as the fourth daughter of a poor family, the miracles that foreshadow her sainthood, her capture and captivity during a famine, her servitude and eventual freedom from captivity, her employment as a musician, her performance of the pilgrimage to Mecca, her visions of the Ka'ba, her encounters with al-Hasan al-Basri, her intimate conversations with God, and the dream-visions that other Sufis had of Rabi'a after her death. Each of these plot elements is discussed with reference to their literary antecedents, their figurative meaning, and their use and adaptation by later writers. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of accounts of Rabi'a's burial sites. Although the "real" Rabi'a is most likely buried near the tomb of al-Hasan al-Basri in the al-Zubayr suburb of modern Basra, other tombs attributed to her can also be found in Jerusalem, Damascus, and Cairo.

Chapter 6 is titled, "Rabi'a the Icon (II): The Secular Image." This title highlights the fact that since the twentieth century, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya has become as much a subject of secular attention as of religious attention. Her depiction in academic literature, New Age literature, Internet entries, and film and television, demonstrate that she is not only a Muslim saint but a secular icon as well. The majority of Chapter 6 discusses Rabi'a as she appears in 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi's academic work, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi* (The Martyr of Divine Love). This chapter also examines Rabi'a the Film Icon, as she appears in the two movies and a miniseries that were inspired by Badawi's book. The chapter also discusses her depiction in the Lebanese writer Widad El Sakkakini's book, *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa* (The Sufi Lover). This feminist treatment of Rabi'a's life draws not only on Badawi's work but also on Simone de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex*.

As mentioned above, just as Margaret Smith succeeded 'Attar as the chief agent of the Rabi'a myth in the English-speaking world, the Egyptian philosopher 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi succeeded 'Attar as the chief agent of the Rabi'a myth in the Arab world. Also like Smith, the verisimilitude of Badawi's depiction of Rabi'a was based on his scholarly reputation. As an Existentialist philosopher, he believed that one's personality develops from one's life experiences. Thus, in *Martyr of Divine Love*, he grounds each aspect of Rabi'a's personality in specific life experiences, even if there is no textual evidence for them. Badawi took his model for the stages of personality development from the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. As part of his interpretation of Kierkegaard, he believed that the full potential of the human being must be attained through struggle. For Badawi, the most intense personal struggles are those associated with faith.

In the first part of Chapter 6, I describe how Badawi traces Rabi'a's career through three stages of development: the aesthetic path, the ethical path, and the religious path. The period of Rabi'a's youth, enslavement, and eventual liberation provides the context for Badawi's depiction of the Aesthetic Rabi'a. Badawi adds to 'Attar's original plot outline by constructing a new image of Rabi'a that visualizes her as beautiful, restless, and independent-minded. Because the aesthetic personality type is supposed to be both artistic and sensual, he adds to her *vita* the trope of sin and redemption by combining 'Attar's reference to Rabi'a as a musician with Christian tropes of saints who had dramatic conversion experiences. Badawi also adds another Christian trope to this image— that of the "fallen woman" saint. He depicts Rabi'a as indulging in a life of sensuality and excess. As she grows into the ethical stage, she repents of her former behavior and turns to asceticism in rejection of her past. The religious or redemptive stage of her life is marked by her conversion to Sufism.

After describing Badawi's revision of 'Attar's narrative in detail, I turn next to Widad El Sakkakini's feminist revision of Badawi's narrative. For El Sakkakini, the aesthetic Rabi'a was a liberated but unfulfilled woman, whose indulgences included sexual experimentation. El Sakkakini imagines that Rabi'a was sexually abused by her master after she was captured and sold into slavery. She is the only writer to suggest that Rabi'a was raped. In this and other aspects of her representation of Rabi'a, El Sakkakini was influenced by Simone De Beauvoir's feminist philosophy as expressed in the book, *The Second Sex*. Modifying Badawi's speculations on Rabi'a's "Road to Damascus" conversion, she uses the example of the early Christian saint Thaïs of Alexandria to depict Rabi'a's transition from the aesthetic stage of her life to the ethical and religious stages. Thaïs was a former courtesan whose legend was popularized in a nineteenth-century Orientalist novel by Anatole France. Drawing as well from another nineteenth-century work, *The Songs of Bilitis* by Pierre Louÿs, El Sakkakini even intimates that the young Rabi'a's sexual experiences may have included women.

Although Badawi's and El Sakkakini's representations of Rabi'a were strongly criticized by many of the writers that came after them, their Existentialist portrayal of Rabi'a's *vita* remains influential today because of its usefulness in popular drama. The second half of Chapter 6 discusses Rabi'a the Film Icon, an image that was made famous by the Egyptian screenwriter Saniya Qurra'a. After writing the play of a radio drama on Rabi'a that aired in 1955, Qurra'a wrote a half-historical and half-fictional book in 1960 titled, *'Arus al-zuhd: Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (The Bride of Asceticism: Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya). This work contains the outline of the screenplay of the movie *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, which appeared in 1963. Qurra'a's depiction of Rabi'a in this film, which was inspired partly by Badawi and partly by the author's own imagination, provided the iconic image of Rabi'a that is best known in the Muslim world today. In this section of Chapter 6, I discuss this film in detail, along with the largely forgotten Egyptian movie *Shahidat al-hubb al-ilahi* (Martyr of Divine Love), which preceded its more famous counterpart in 1962.

At the end of Chapter 6, I turn once more to Roland Barthes' concept of the "reality effect" to discuss how the presentation of an image on film provides a more immediate— and hence more powerful— sense of reality than any hagiography, scholarly work, or novel could do. Through the power of what Barthes calls "cinematographic hypnosis," a movie produces an aura of factuality that is powerful because of the immediacy of the experience it evokes. For this reason, says Barthes, film as a genre is inherently ideological. At the end of the chapter, I illustrate these theoretical points through the example of the 1996 miniseries from Egyptian television, *Rabi'a ta'ud* (Rabi'a Returns).

CHAPTER 1

RABI'A THE TEACHER

"Take me to the teacher (*mu'addiba*). For when I am apart from her, I can find no solace."
> — Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 778 CE), speaking about Rabi'a in Sulami's *Dhikr al-niswa al-muta'abbidat al-sufiyyat* (Memorial of Female Sufi Devotees)

"He who is not educated by virtue (*man lam yu'addibhu al-jamil*) is reformed by tribulations."
> — Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid (d. 809 CE) in Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *al-'Iqd al-Farid* (The Peerless Necklace)

I.   WHO WAS THE HISTORICAL RABI'A?

Who was the historical Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya? As stated in the Introduction, the Rabi'a who is famous for millions of Muslims and non-Muslims around the world is a "constructed saint," a composite image of female spirituality whose outline continues to be shaped through stories, songs, poems, and other popular forms of expression. Also as stated in the Introduction, the inconic figure of Rabi'a as she appears in Sufi literature, popular tales, and now cinema and the Internet constitutes a *master narrative*: her identity is embodied in a trans-historical narrative that is deeply embedded not only in the culture of Islam, but now in global culture as well. To put it another way, Rabi'a is a product of cultural memory, and any serious attempt to study her representation in different narrative genres must involve what Nicholas Wolterstorff has called the *archaeology of cultural memory*: "telling the story of how we got where we are in our thinking."[1]

However, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is not just a figure of literary reputation and cultural memory. There was a real person at the beginning, a woman who lived in the Iraqi city of Basra roughly between the years 714 and 801 CE.[2] Although we know little in detail about her, we can surmise that she was a woman whose personal example was impressive to her contemporaries; otherwise she would not have been used by writers in the generations immediately after her death as a rhetorical example. Therefore, the archaeology of the narrative tropes and cultural constructs that make up the building blocks for the master narrative of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya must start where all archaeological investigations begin, with the most concrete evidence at our disposal, no matter how scarce that evidence may be.

a.   *Early Sources for the Historical Rabi'a*

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[1] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xiv.

[2] Although a few sources claim that Rabi'a died as early as 752-3 CE, this date can be rejected on the basis of accounts attributed to her students and associates, who flourished in the second half of the eighth century CE.

Unlike an actual archaeological investigation, the archaeology of cultural memory about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya can uncover no artifacts that can be attributed unquestionably to Rabi'a herself. She wrote no books and no hagiographical account was written about her during her lifetime.[3] In literary terms, there is no "prior text" on which to base an outline of Rabi'a's life. What was to become the defacto "prior text" for Rabi'a's *vita* was not written until the beginning of the thirteenth century CE, more than 400 years after her death. How, then, are we to determine which of the many accounts of her actions, sayings, and teachings represent the historical Rabi'a? Is there any way to sift through the accumulated narratives to find a trace of the person behind the myth? There is one way, although it is not methodologically foolproof. One can turn to the sources that provide what are likely to be the chronologically closest views of Rabi'a extant in Islamic literature. However, it should not be forgotten that even these were composed fifty years or more after her death. The earliest accounts about Rabi'a come from four sources: (a) a single aphorism in a doctrinal work by the ninth-century Sufi al-Harith al-Muhasibi; (b) anecdotes reported by the ninth-century hagiographer Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Burjulani; (c) statements ascribed to Rabi'a in the works of the ninth-century non-Sufi essayists Jahiz and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur; (d) alleged first-hand accounts about Rabi'a that were reported on behalf of her students in Sufi doctrinal and hagiographical works from the tenth through the thirteenth centuries CE.[4]

The earliest non-Sufi writer to provide information on Rabi'a was Abu 'Uthman al-Jahiz (d. 868 CE), a noted essayist and theologian whose writings encompassed a wide range of subjects.[5] Jahiz mentions Rabi'a in two of his books, *Kitab al-hayawan* (The Book of Animals) and *Kitab al-bayan wa-l-tabyin* (Treatise on the Demonstrative Proof and the Art of Persuasion). Jahiz's references to Rabi'a are significant because of his closeness to her in time and place. As a native of Basra, Rabi'a's home city, he may have known people who were personally acquainted with her. Clearly, he had heard stories about her and was well aware of her reputation. However, even at this early stage, Rabi'a was not immune to the effects of literary representation. In his works, Jahiz defined her rhetorically and transformed her into what Pierre Hadot has called a *figure*. Like a character sketch in a novel, the creation of a figure defines "what we think we know" about a historical personage. For Hadot, the *figure* of a personage is a constructed

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[3] The assumption by Margaret Smith and other modern writers that Rabi'a left behind written works is based on the attribution of certain poems to her, such as the famous "Poem of the Two Loves," which will be discussed in Chapter 3. However, most if not all of these poems were not by Rabi'a herself but were composed by others. To date, no written work has been linked conclusively to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. On the subject of Rabi'a's purported writings see Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 69 and 125-6 and (Rainbow Bridge) 47 and 101-2.

[4] In assuming that the historical Rabi'a can be discussed to a certain extent, I disagree with Julian Baldick, who claims that early accounts about Rabi'a are "too allusive, and usually too late, to have any value for reconstructing her life and teachings." In my opinion, Baldick holds early sources on Rabi'a to a standard of objectivity that could not be met even by works on some modern historical figures. See Julian Baldick, "The Legend of Rabi'a of Basra: Christian Antecedents, Muslim Counterparts," *Religion* 19 (1990), 233.

[5] The best work on Jahiz is Charles Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jahiz*, translated from the French by D. M. Hawke (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). For a short introduction to Jahiz's works, see also James E. Montgomery, "al-Jahiz," *Dictionary of Literary Biography Volume 311: Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, Edited by Michael Cooperson and Shawkat M. Toorawa (Farmington Hills, Michigan: Thomson Gale, 2005), 231-42; another useful reference is Charles Pellat, "Djahiz," *EI*[2], vol. 2, 385-7.

representation. However, because it encapsulates what we feel we know about the personage, it is just as much a historical "reality" as the personage herself. Hadot explains this phenomenon in the following way: "The *historical* Socrates is probably an insoluble enigma. But the *figure* of Socrates, as it is sketched by Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes, is a well-attested historical fact." [6]

According to Michel de Certeau, the process of establishing the identity of a saint like Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya starts by associating a personage with a place.[7] Since the time of Jahiz, Rabi'a has most often been associated with her city of origin. Thus, she is most often known as "Rabi'a of Basra." As we shall see later on in this chapter, Jahiz also attempts to define Rabi'a rhetorically by fitting her into his theory of *bayan*, a concept that refers to rhetorical excellence. Modern scholars consider *Kitab al-hayawan* and *al-Bayan wa-l-tabyin*, the works of Jahiz in which Rabi'a appears, to contain the most important discussions of Jahiz's theology. This theology was rationalistic and depended on logical arguments to define the nature of God.[8] Although Jahiz saw Rabi'a as different from himself in her approach to Islam, he nevertheless used her as an example for some of his arguments. By using the figure of Rabi'a rhetorically in this way, he thus played an important role in the creation of her narrative image.

Several modern scholars have already remarked on the references to Rabi'a in Jahiz's works. However, no one has yet mentioned the references to her by another ninth-century essayist, Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur. Like Jahiz, Ahmad ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur of Baghdad (d. 893 CE) was a literary critic and cultural observer.[9] His most notable work was a local history of Baghdad titled *Kitab Baghdad* (The Book of Baghdad). This work contained a description of Baghdad and accounts of events that occurred during the reigns of the Abbasid Caliphs. Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur supported himself as a book dealer and published other works on a wide variety of subjects. The most famous of these was *Balaghat al-nisa'* (The Eloquence of Women), which is the earliest extant work devoted to women in Islam. In this work, Rabi'a is characterized as *Rabi'a al-Musma'iyya*, "Rabi'a the Woman Who Must Be Heard."[10] This is an important appellation because it shows that Rabi'a was already regarded as an iconic figure less than 100 years after her death.[11]

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[6] See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold L. Davidson, Michael Chase trans. (Oxford and Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995), 116 and n. 80.

[7] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, Tom Conley trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 272

[8] Montgomery, "al-Jahiz," 237-9

[9] See Shawkat Toorawa, "Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography Volume 311: Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, 141-9. See also, Franz Rosenthal, "Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur," *EI²*, vol. 3, 692-3.

[10] Ahmad ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur al-Khurasani, *Balaghat al-nisa'*, Muhammad Tahir al-Zayn Ed. (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Sundus, 1993), 210

[11] On the term *musma'*, see E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984 reprint of 1863 first edition), 1429. In the Book of Asceticism (*Kitab al-zuhd*) in *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin*, Jahiz mentions a man named 'Amr ibn al-Khawla, whose mother was called "Khawla of the Masami'a." The modern editor of this work states in a footnote that *al-masami'a* referred to the descendants of Masma' ibn Shihab ibn 'Umar. However, he cites no source for this information. It is etymologically possible that the Rabi'a to whom Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur refers was "Rabi'a al-Masma'iyya" rather than Rabi'a al-Musma'iyya. However, I have not been able to find any independent verification of a clan of Masami'a in the major biographical works dealing with Iraq in this period. In addition, it will become clear below that Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's accounts about Rabi'a match those of Jahiz quite closely.

The greatest amount of early information on Rabi'a is to be found in Sufi doctrinal and hagiographical works. Many of these works claim to reproduce first-hand accounts that were transmitted by Rabi'a's students and contemporaries. Although the earliest of these accounts have a strong aura of authenticity, they are historiographically problematical because most of the works in which they appear were written a century and a half or more after Rabi'a's death. Most early Sufi hagiographical works were examples of *tabaqat* (levels, classes, or generations) literature. These were biographical dictionaries in which noted Sufis were classified either chronologically or by their spiritual practices.[12] The *tabaqat* genre originated in the field of Hadith studies out of the need to assess the reputation of the bearers and transmitters of tradition.[13] Most Sufi *tabaqat* works sought to link the Sufi tradition to the "Righteous Predecessors" (*al-Salaf al-Salih*), the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad and the following two generations of their successors. This category of individuals comprised the most important tradition-bearers of Sunni Islam. In the words of the contemporary historian Tarif Khalidi, the *tabaqat* genre provided continuity between the generation of *al-Salaf al-Salih* and subsequent generations of pious Muslims: it linked the "then" to the "here and now."[14] Because of their origin in Hadith studies, Sufi *tabaqat* works were often written in the style of Hadith collections. The best of them relied on first-hand accounts that contained chains of oral and written transmission (sing. *isnad*) leading from the witness of the event back to the author of the work in which the account of the event appeared.

The earliest known *tabaqat* work to mention Rabi'a appears to have been *Kitab al-ruhban* (The Book of Monks) by Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Burjulani of Baghdad (d. 852 CE).[15] Although no copy of this work is known to exist at the present time, portions of it can be found in later Sufi works. When chains of transmission are cited in Sufi *tabaqat* works, the appearance of the name "Muhammad ibn al-Husayn" indicates that the account was transmitted by Burjulani and most likely came from *Kitab al-ruhban*. The two anecdotes about Rabi'a from Burjulani that can be identified are extremely important because they may represent the earliest accounts about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in existence. These anecdotes will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

Therefore, one can conclude that both authors were talking about the same person. See Abu 'Uthman 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz, *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin*, ed. Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Daljamuni (Beirut: n.d. reprint of 1900 first edition), vol. 3, 110, n. 2.

[12] On the origins of Sufi *tabaqat* literature, see my Introduction to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 48-53.

[13] For an overview of the *tabaqat* genre, see Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 93-5; and Claude Gillot, "Tabakat," *EI*[2], 7-10. See also, Ibrahim Hafsi, "Recherches sur le genre 'Tabaqat' dans la litérature arabe," *Arabica* xxiii (1976), 228-65, xxiv (1977), 1-41 and 150-86; and R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History, a Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 187-208.

[14] Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 46.

[15] For information on Burjulani, see Tor Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles: Studies in Early Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Birgitta Sharpe and Introduction by Eric Sharpe (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 32. See also, Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, Benjamin Clark, trans. (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1997),, 160. See also, Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 1071 CE), *Tarikh Baghdad wa Madinat al-Salam*, ed. Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), vol. 2, 219, where the traditionist Ahmad ibn Hanbal cites Burjulani as a reliable source of information on Muslim ascetics.

The earliest extant Sufi work to mention Rabi'a was written by al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi of Baghdad (d. 857 CE). In the treatise titled *al-Qasd wa-l-ruju' ila Allah* (God as the Goal and Return), Muhasibi states: "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya would say at the coming of night, 'The night has come, the darkness has mingled (*ikhtalata al-zalam*), and every lover is left alone with his beloved. Now I am alone with you, my Beloved.'"[16] As with the references to "Rabi'a al-Musma'iyya" in Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's *Balaghat al-nisa'* and the anecdotes from Burjulani noted above, no scholar has yet recognized this passage as the earliest reference to Rabi'a. Muhasibi's mention of Rabi'a is significant for two reasons. First, his reference to Rabi'a is the earliest apart from Burjulani's. Second, like Jahiz, he spent the first part of his life in Basra, Rabi'a's native city. Born in 781 CE, he would have lived in Basra during Rabi'a's lifetime and may even have seen her. In her book on Muhasibi, which was published seven years after her influential work *Rabi'a the Mystic*, Margaret Smith agrees that Rabi'a's fame "must certainly have come to [Muhasibi's] ears."[17] Smith also states that Muhasibi quotes Rabi'a in one of his works; however, she provides no source for this claim and the statement she reproduces is different from that given above.[18] Despite her extensive knowledge of manuscript collections in the Middle East, *al-Qasd wa al-ruju' ila Allah* does not appear in Smith's list of Muhasibi's known works.[19] However, we can be fairly certain that this work was in fact Muhasibi's. 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata, the Arabic editor of Muhasibi's works, states that two manuscript copies of the work can be found in collections in Istanbul that would have been known to Smith in the early 1930s.[20] He also confirms the work's authenticity by means of doctrinal and stylistic similarities with other, better-known examples of Muhasibi's works.

The next extant Sufi work to mention Rabi'a was written over a century after Muhasibi's. This is *Kitab al-luma' fi-l-tasawwuf* (Flashes of Insight into Sufism) by Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 988 CE). In a section of this book on the miracles of Muslim saints, Sarraj arranges the early tradition-bearers of Sufism into a list based on generations. As in other Sufi *tabaqat* lists, these generations go back to *al-Salaf al-Salih*. One of the most important of these generations includes Muhammad ibn Wasi' (d. 738 CE), Malik ibn Dinar (d. 745 CE), Farqad al-Sinji (d. 748-9 CE), Ayyub al-Sakhtiyani (d. 748-9 CE), 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd (d. 793-4 CE), and Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 801 CE).[21] Significantly, all of these individuals are from the city of Basra.[22]

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[16] Abu 'Abdullah al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi, *al-Qasd wa-l-ruju' ila Allah*, ed. 'Abd al-Qadir Ahmad 'Ata (Cairo: Dar al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1980), 104

[17] Margaret Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad: A Study of the Life and Teaching of Harith B. Asad al-Muhasibi, A.D. 781-857* (London, U.K.: Sheldon Press, 1977 reprint of 1935 first edition), 215

[18] Ibid; in Smith's account, Rabi'a is asked, "How did you attain to this station (of intimacy with God)?" and she replied, "By abandoning what did not concern me, and seeking fellowship with Him Who is Eternal." This statement will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, where it is traced to a later source.

[19] Smith, *An Early Mystic*, 44-59

[20] In the Introduction to his edition of Muhasibi's *Bad' man anaba ila Allah* (The Beginning of Penitence for the Sake of God), 'Ata states that manuscript copies of *al-Qasd wa-l-ruju' ila Allah* can be found in the Jarallah (no. 1728) and Shehid Ali (no. 3319) manuscript collections in Istanbul. Al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi, *al-Tawba*, ed. 'Abd al-Qadir Ahmad 'Ata (Cairo: Dar al-Islah, 1982) 18. However, in his earlier (1980) edition of *al-Qasd*, 'Ata states that only a single copy of this manuscript exists (Muhasibi, *al-Qasd*, 27).

[21] Abu Nasr 'Abdallah b. 'Ali al-Sarraj al-Tusi, *The Kitab al-Luma' fi'l-Tasawwuf*, Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, ed. (London: Luzac & Co. Ltd., 1963 reprint of 1914 first edition), 322

[22] See Massignon, *Essay*, 114.

According to Sarraj, early scholars and the founders of schools of Islamic religious practice used them as sources of tradition and confirmed what they had to say. The next generation of tradition-bearers for Sarraj included Ayyub al-Sakhtiyani (already mentioned), Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 778 CE), and Hammad ibn Zayd (d, 793 CE). These men also came from Basra or spent considerable time in that city. According to Sarraj, none of these figures denied the teachings of Rabi'a or her contemporaries: "They are our leaders in religion and confirm our knowledge of God's rules and regulations and our knowledge of what is permissible and forbidden. So how can we believe them in some of what they report and not believe them in other things?"[23] This statement from *Kitab al-luma'* provides further testimony for Rabi'a's reputation as an important figure of early Islam.

Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami's (d. 1021 CE) *Dhikr al-niswa al-muta'abbidat al-sufiyyat* (Memorial of Female Sufi Devotees) contains accounts from four Sufi *tabaqat* works that were written before Sarraj's *Kitab al-luma'*. The earliest of these is Burjulani's *Kitab al-ruhban*. Sulami also includes accounts from another *Kitab al-ruhban* by Ibrahim ibn al-Junayd of Baghdad (d. 883-84 CE). In addition, he includes information from *Tabaqat al-nussak* (Generations of the Ascetic Ritualists) by Abu Sa'id ibn al- A'rabi of Basra (d. in Mecca, 952-3 CE) and *Hikayat al-awliya'* (Stories of the Saints) by Ja'far al-Khuldi of Baghdad (d. 959-60 CE).[24] Unfortunately, all of these works now appear to be lost. However, we know something of their contents because Sulami and other authors of early works cited them. For example, citations of Burjulani appear in many Islamic prosopographical sources and a portion of Ja'far al-Khuldi's book can be found in the *Fihrist* (Bibliographical Catalogue) of Muhammad ibn al-Nadim of Baghdad (d. 990 CE).[25] Sulami was conscientious about citing his sources of information and listed full chains of transmission whenever possible. Thus, his Book of Sufi Women can potentially be used as a historical source. However, while some of Sulami's notices on Rabi'a's female contemporaries come from the works mentioned above, his notices on Rabi'a does not. It is not clear why this is the case, because Sulami includes a report about Rabi'a from one of these sources in another work.[26]

The majority of the references to Rabi'a in works of Sufism do not appear until nearly 150 years after her death. This underscores the importance of the references to Rabi'a in the works of Burjulani, Muhasibi, and Jahiz, who are separated from her by only half a century, and in Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's *Balaghat al-nisa'*, which appeared a generation later. It also appears that Sulami's Book of Sufi Women is the earliest extant Sufi work to give complete chains of transmission for reports about Rabi'a, although they do not come from the sources mentioned above. None of the extant Sufi works that predate Sulami's Book of Sufi Women provide chains of transmission for accounts about Rabi'a. These include, besides Muhasibi's *al-Qasd wa-l-ruju' ila Allah* and Sarraj's *Kitab al-luma'*, Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 990 CE), *Kitab al-ta'arruf li-*

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[23] Sarraj, *The Kitab al-Luma'*, 322-3

[24] On these works, see R. Cornell, Introduction to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 52-53 and notes.

[25] See Bayard Dodge, trans., *The Fihrist of al-Nadim: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), vol. 1, 455-61.

[26] See, for example, the account about Rabi'a taken from Ja'far al-Khuldi ("Ja'far ibn Muhammad") in Sulami's *Kitab 'uyub al-nafs wa mudawatuha* (Book of the Faults of the Soul and their Cures), in Nasrollah Pourjavady, *Majmu'at Athar Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami* (Tehran: Tehran University Publishing Center, 2000), vol. 1, 72-73. Each work in this collection of Sulami texts is paginated separately.

madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf (Introduction to the Methodology of the Sufis); Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 996 CE), *Qut al-qulub* (The Sustenance of Hearts); and 'Abd al-Malik al-Kharkushi (d. 1016 CE), *Tahdhib al-asrar* (The Primer of Secrets). Therefore, according to modern standards of historical research, the citations from Burjulani, Muhasibi, Jahiz, Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, and Sulami are unique in that they are the closest we can get to primary sources about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.

b. *Students and Associates of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*

What do the early sources tell us about the students and associates of Rabi'a? For Sulami and most other writers, the most important of Rabi'a's students was Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 776 CE), a key figure in the formative period of Islamic jurisprudence.[27] Although Thawri was considered an important source of tradition by the Sufis, he was not a Sufi himself. For example, his commentary on the Qur'an is accepted as an important work of early Qur'anic exegesis by all Sunni Muslims.[28] Thawri was born and raised in Kufa but lived in Basra at the end of his life. He and Rabi'a were approximately the same age when they knew each other. Sulami reports that Thawri sought Rabi'a's advice on ethical matters and that he sought her spiritual counsel as well.[29]

Sulami also reports that Shu'ba ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 776-77 or 781-82 CE) transmitted Rabi'a's teachings.[30] Shu'ba was a Hadith scholar and friend of Thawri who resided in Basra. He also wrote an early commentary on the Qur'an.[31] Born in the Iraqi city of Wasit to a family of Persian origin, he was one of many non-Arab clients (*mawla*, pl. *mawali*) of Arab clans who were beginning to rise to positions of importance in the early Abbasid period. Another Hadith scholar and companion of Thawri who reported on Rabi'a was Ja'far ibn Sulayman al-Dab'i (d. 794-5 CE).[32] In an *isnad* cited by Sulami, Dab'i confirms a contention made by Abu Bakr al-Sarraj that Rabi'a knew Muhammad ibn Wasi', although she would have been in her early twenties at the time of Ibn Wasi's death. Ibn Wasi' was a Hadith transmitter, Qur'an reciter, and ascetic who was a student of the famous Sunni theologian al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728 CE).[33] Ibn Wasi' and other students of Hasan, such as Malik ibn Dinar and Farqad al-Sinji, who are also mentioned along with Rabi'a by Sarraj, may have served as important links between Rabi'a and Hasan, with

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[27] See Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 74 and 76. The most extensive treatment of the life and teachings of Sufyan al-Thawri can be found in Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani (d. 1038-39 CE), *Hilyat al-awliya' wa tabaqat al-asfiya'* (Adornment of the Saints and Generations of the Pure), ed. Abu Hajr al-Sa'id ibn Basyuni Zaghlul (Beirut: n.d. [reprint of the 1938 edition]), vol. 6, 356-93 and vol. 7, 3-143.

[28] See Abu 'Abdallah Sufyan ibn Sa'id ibn Masruq al-Thawri al-Kufi, *Tafsir Sufyan al-Thawri*, ed. Imtiaz Ali 'Arshi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1983 reprint of 1965 first edition). The Ranpur, India, manuscript on which this edition is based is the only known copy of this work. See also, Claude Gilliot, "The Beginnings of Qur'anic Exegesis," *The Qur'an: Formative Interpretation*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing and Variorum, 1999), 15.

[29] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 74

[30] Ibid and Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 6, 144-209

[31] See Charles Pellat, *Le Milieu Basrien et la formation de Gahiz* (Paris: Librarie d'Amérique et d'Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1953), 83.

[32] See Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 78 and Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 6, 287-96; according to Massignon, Dab'i was a disciple of Farqad al-Sinji. See idem, *Essay*, 115.

[33] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 78 and n. 16; see also, Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 2, 345-57.

whom she is often associated anachronistically in later works. Although Rabi'a would have been too young to know al-Hasan al-Basri during his lifetime, it would have been possible for her to have known his students.

Sulami also mentions that Rabi'a had several female disciples and colleagues. These included Maryam of Basra (d. early ninth century CE), who apparently was a love mystic.[34] Others included Sha'wana of al-Ubulla (d. ca. 770 CE), who had both male and female disciples like Rabi'a (see Chapter 2),[35] and Rabi'a al-Azdiyya of Basra (d. end of eighth century CE). Rabi'a al-Azdiyya has often been confused with Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya by later generations of Sufis.[36] Surprisingly, Sulami cites none of these women as sources of accounts about Rabi'a. This distinction only belongs to a woman who appears in the much later *Sifat al-safwa* (Attributes of the Pure) by the Hanbali scholar Abu al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201 CE).[37] Ibn al-Jawzi cites Rabi'a's servant 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal as a source of information.[38] According to an *isnad* provided by the Hanbali prosopographer Muhammad al-Dhahabi (d. 1374 CE), the accounts of 'Abda that were used by Ibn al-Jawzi originally came from Burjulani's ninth-century *Kitab al-ruhban*.[39] It is difficult to assess the reliability of these accounts because not only does 'Abda claim to be present at Rabi'a's death, she also recites dream narratives that recount posthumous conversations with her. The dream conversation is a common trope in Islamic hagiography and serves to establish the divine acceptance of the person who speaks from beyond the grave. Often, such conversations are not about the deceased, but about other famous people who were known to the deceased or her companions. In 'Abda's dream accounts, Rabi'a serves as a messenger from the beyond, which confirms her status as a respected transmitter of Sufi traditions.

II. RABI'A IN THE EARLIEST SOURCES

a. *Rabi'a the Arab*

Jahiz mentions Rabi'a eight times in his works: four times in *Kitab al-hayawan* and four times in *al-Bayan wa-l-tabyin*. In these works she is not called "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya," the name by which she has become famous, but is instead identified as "Rabi'a al-Qaysiyya." Although these appellations seem different, they do not contradict each other. The name *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* refers to 'Adi ibn Qays, the Arab clan in Basra to which Rabi'a belonged. In Arabic, a

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[34] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 84-5

[35] Ibid, 106-7

[36] Ibid, 128-9

[37] The most recent edited edition of this work is Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, ed. Mahmud Fakhuri and Muhammad Rawwas Qal'anji (Beirut, 1986), in four volumes. In the present study, references to *Sifat al-safwa* are from the Alexandria, Egypt, Dar Ibn Khaldun reprinted edition in two volumes (not dated). The section on Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya can be found in vol. 2, 710-12 of the Alexandria edition. For a complete English translation of Ibn al-Jawzi's notice on Rabi'a see the Ibn al-Jawzi Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 276-83.

[38] See the Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 280-2, for an English translation of Ibn al-Jawzi's references to 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal. The original can be found in Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 712.

[39] See the *isnad* from Burjulani via 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal in Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad b. 'Uthman al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala'*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut and Salih al-Sumr (Beirut: Mu'asasa al-Risala, 1996), vol. 8, 242.

man from 'Adi ibn Qays would be called *'adawi*; a woman would be called *'adawiyya*. *Qays* was the name of the tribe to which the 'Adi ibn Qays belonged. The Banu Qays (Sons of Qays) belonged to a large tribal confederation called Mudar. Both Qays and the Prophet Muhammad's tribe of Quraysh were part of Mudar. In early Islamic times, belonging to one of the tribes of Mudar meant that one was a northern Arab, as opposed to the "Yemenis" (also known as Qahtanis or Himyaris) who had originally come from southern Arabia. Tribes of both northern and southern Arabian origin had been living in Iraq for two or more centuries before Islam. Segments of the tribes of Mudar were numerous in southern Iraq and in the region of Basra. Most segments of Qays settled in the Jazira, a region west of the Euphrates River that stretched between Iraq and Syria. A group of Qays also settled in Basra, where they made up one "fifth" (*khums*) of the five original tribal groups that settled in that city. The fifth to which the 'Adi ibn Qays belonged was known as *Ahl al-'Aliyya* (The People of Upper Arabia).[40] Yemeni Arabs were also numerous in Basra. One of the most important Yemeni tribes in Basra was Azd. The identity of this tribe is reflected in the name of Rabi'a's contemporary and namesake, Rabi'a al-Azdiyya.[41]

Unlike some later writers, who depict Rabi'a as coming from a non-Arab background, Jahiz places her firmly within the Qays tribe and even suggests that she enjoyed a high status among her clan. In *al-Bayan wa-l-tabyin* he says: "Rabi'a al-Qaysiyya was asked, 'Could we ask the men of your clan to buy you a servant to do your household chores?' She replied, 'By God, I am ashamed to ask for the world from the One who owns the world. So how can I ask for the world from one who does not own it?'"[42] The same statement also appears in *Kitab al-hayawan*, but in a slightly different version. Here Rabi'a is asked, "Would you give us permission to speak to your people so that they collect for you the price of a servant? He could be a support for you and be of sufficient service to you so that you could devote yourself to worship."[43] A third variant of this story appears in *Balaghat al-nisa'* by Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, where Rabi'a is told to ask the Sultan (i.e., the governor of Basra) to repair her dwelling. Her response to this advice is the same as in Jahiz' account: "By God, I do not ask for the world from the One who owns it, so how can I ask for the world from one who does not own it?"[44]

The context in which Rabi'a's response is situated reveals important information about her likely standing within her clan and in Basra at large. In Jahiz's account, Rabi'a is highly respected by the leaders of her clan, who are concerned that her domestic duties interfere with her religious vocation. By offering to buy her a servant or a slave to free her from her chores, they confirm that she was a highly valued person, despite the fact that she was a woman. In *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin*, it is suggested that the leaders of her clan should buy her a servant. In *al-Hayawan*, it is suggested that the clan members together should collect money to buy her a servant. In

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[40] Pellat, *Le Milieu Basrien*, 23

[41] For a concise overview of tribal fractions in Umayyad Iraq, see Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), vol. 1, 227-30. On Arab settlement patterns in the region of Basra, see Michael G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 245-50.

[42] Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 3, 66

[43] Abu 'Uthman 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz, *Kitab al-hayawan*, ed. 'Abd al-Salam Muhammad Harun (Beirut: Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1969 [reprint of 1949 first edition]), vol. 5, 589

[44] Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, *Balaghat al-nisa'*, 205

Balaghat al-nisa', she is told by the leaders of her clan to ask the governor of Basra to rebuild her house. Obviously, this is something that a governor would not do for everyone. All three versions of this story make it clear that Rabi'a was highly respected in her community and was considered a valued asset by her people. In the social context of her time, a woman who earned such a high level of respect was not likely to have been a slave or a servant herself. It is more likely that she was a *hurra*, a free woman of good standing in her clan.

Several non-Arab Sufis and even some Arab writers depict Rabi'a as a *mawlat*, a non-Arab client who was attached to an Arab tribe.[45] Up until the end of the Umayyad Caliphate (ca. 750 CE), a non-Muslim could only convert to Islam if she were sponsored by a patron from an Arab tribe, who either adopted the convert into the tribe or bound the convert to the tribe through a legal act of clientage (*muwalat*). The client was known as a *mawla* (fem. *mawlat*) and typically was either a freed slave or a free non-Arab (*'ajami*) who provided useful services for the patron or the patron's clan. Although it was possible under Islamic law for a freed slave or even a slave to own a slave herself, this was very rare, just as it was rare for a servant to employ a servant.[46]

While it is theoretically possible that Rabi'a was of non-Arab origin, the information provided by Jahiz and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur suggests otherwise. Although she might have been attached to her clan through clientage, she would have had to enjoy such an unusually high status that she transcended the social restrictions placed on non-Arab clients in the Umayyad period. A situation such as this would have been highly improbable.[47] In addition, some claims that Rabi'a was of non-Arab origin can be shown to be unlikely because they were based on faulty information. For example, Sulami's claim that Rabi'a was a *mawlat* in his Book of Sufi Women is undermined by a mistake that would never have been made by a native of Basra. Although Sulami refers to Rabi'a as "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya," he states that she was a *mawlat* of the Arab clan of Al 'Atik (The People of 'Atik).[48] The appellation *'Adawiyya* meant that Rabi'a belonged to the clan of 'Adi ibn Qays, which, as we have seen, was part of the north Arabian tribal confederation of Mudar. However, Al 'Atik was a clan of the South Arabian Azd Arabs. Because of this, it could not have been related in any way to either Qays or Mudar.[49] It would have been impossible for Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya to bear the name of a clan from Qays and to be bound through clientage to a clan of South Arabian origin. If she had been the client of a South

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[45] See for example Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 74, where Rabi'a is depicted as a *mawlat* of the clan of Al 'Atik.

[46] On the concept of clientage in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, see Jacob Lassner, *The Shaping of 'Abbasid Rule* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 96-8; and Mahmood Ibrahim, *Merchant Capital and Islam* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1990), 59-60 and 182-3.

[47] The Umayyad-era poet Jarir once insulted the matriarch of a rival's clan by accusing her of being a slave and corrupted by her "foreign stink." Had Rabi'a been a non-Arab client, she would likely have been subjected to similar abuse. See Allen Fromherz, "Tribalism, Tribal Feuds, and the Social Status of Women," in Amira El Azhary Sonbol, ed., *Gulf Women* (Doha, Qatar: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing, 2012), 60.

[48] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 74; unlike most of Sulami's information about Rabi'a, this claim is not supported by an *isnad*.

[49] On 'Adi ibn Qays and Al 'Atik, see Pellat, *Le Milieu Basrien*, 28 and 30. Pellat's information corrects the mistake in Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 74 n. 3, where Al 'Atik is linked both to 'Adi ibn Qays and to Quraysh. Like Sulami, Massignon (*Essay*, 149 n. 458) also sees Rabi'a as a freedwoman of Al 'Atik, but "corrects" her tribal designation to make her a member of Azd. However, this would also make her the same person as Rabi'a al-Azdiyya.

Arabian clan, she would have borne that clan's name. We have already seen that there were two Rabi'as living in Basra at the same time: Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and Rabi'a al-Azdiyya. Unlike Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, Rabi'a al-Azdiyya's name indicates that she belonged to a tribe of South Arabian origin. Therefore, it is more likely to have been Rabi'a al-Azdiyya—not Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya— who was from Al 'Atik of the Banu Azd and who may have been a client of that South Arabian clan. While Sulami corrects some misinformation about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in his Book of Sufi Women, he seems to have inadvertently contributed to a centuries-long tradition of confusion over the two Rabi'as of Basra.[50]

b. Rabi'a the Leader

The *hurra*, the free Arab woman, played an important role in the culture of the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods. Unfortunately, little research seems to have been done on this subject. It is surprising, given today's widespread interest in Women's Studies, that one finds more references to Arab women of high standing in studies dating from the first half of the twentieth century than afterwards. Margaret Smith, writing in 1928, notes "There is little doubt that the free Arab woman in Pre-Islamic and even early Islamic times held a more independent and even respected position than the Muslim woman of today." She goes on to mention several notable women who lived in the Pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods.[51] Philip K. Hitti, writing in 1937, discusses the Prophet Muhammad's great-granddaughter Sukayna bint al-Husayn (d. 735 CE), who was a patron not only of fashion and beauty, but also of literature.[52] He notes that many women of the Caliphal household under the early Abbasids distinguished themselves as patrons of the literary and intellectual arts.[53] In *Two Queens of Baghdad*, published in 1946, Nabia Abbott discusses the philanthropy of Zubayda (d. 831 CE), the Arab wife of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid. Zubayda made six pilgrimages to Mecca, endowed waterworks in that city, and trained 100 slave girls to chant the Qur'an around the clock at the Caliphal palace in Baghdad.[54] Most relevant to the present discussion are the observations of Ahmad Amin in *Duha al-Islam*

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[50] The conflation of reports about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and Rabi'a al-Azdiyya may have started as early as the publication of *Kitab al-ruhban* by Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Burjulani in the mid-ninth century CE. The fourteenth-century biographer Muhammad al-Dhahabi, apparently following Sulami, also makes the mistake of saying that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was a client of Al 'Atik. Dhahabi also cites an account about Rabi'a that Burjulani reported from a member of the Al 'Atik clan of Azd. This account states that Rabi'a refused to meet with Sufyan al-Thawri. Since we know from Jahiz and other sources that Sufyan visited Rabi'a frequently, this early account by Burjulani is probably also about Rabi'a al-Azdiyya rather than Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Dhahabi, *Siyar*, vol. 8, 241

[51] See Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 141 and (Rainbow Bridge), 111. Smith's praise of the Pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arab woman is part of a polemic against Islam's subjugation of women. The statement quoted above ends with the contention, "[The Muslim woman's] present degraded position is due to Islamic teaching which has prevailed since the second and third centuries of the Muslim era, to keep her in a position of almost complete subordination to the male sex." Smith goes on to state, "The ultimate effect of [the Prophet Muhammad's] legislation was the degradation and enslavement of Muslim womanhood throughout the centuries up to the present time" (156).

[52] Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs from the Earliest Times to the Present* (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1970 reprint of 1937 first edition), 237-8.

[53] Ibid, 333

[54] Nabia Abbott, *Two Queens of Baghdad: Mother and Wife of Harun al-Rashid* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974 reprint of 1946 first edition), 160 and 240-47.

(The Mid-Morning of Islam, published in 1933), who notes that although slave-girls were more highly valued as companions than free women were in the early Abbasid period, a group of high-class Arab women distinguished themselves in the arts and sciences: "We find that many free women employed themselves in the sciences; however, the majority of those who employed themselves in this way were religiously motivated, such as many female Hadith scholars and Sufis."[55] In one of the few recent articles on the subject of free women in early Arabia, Barbara Freyer Stowasser agrees that the *hara'ir* of the Jahiliyya and Early Islamic periods were honored and respected, but adds the following caveat: "But this free . . . Arabian woman was also ideologically ensconced in her tribe, from which she derived her protection and to which she owed all her public activities."[56]

If Rabi'a was a *hurra*, as Jahiz and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur indicate, and if she enjoyed so much respect from her clan that its leaders wanted to buy her a slave at their own expense, then it is likely that she was one of the high status *hara'ir* described by Amin and Stowasser. However, we should keep in mind that although women of high status in the early Islamic period were likely to have been wealthy, status and wealth were not necessarily related in Arab society at that time. It was possible for a woman of high status to devote herself to a life of asceticism and poverty and retain or even exceed the influence and authority she would have enjoyed had she been wealthy. As Barbara Stowasser implies, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya would have been a valued asset for the leaders of Banu 'Adi ibn Qays because she had attained a high reputation through her religious vocation. It would also not be unusual for a tribally protected woman of high status to attract male religious figures such as Sufyan al-Thawri as her students and associates and still retain her good reputation. From what early sources tell us about Thawri, it is not likely that he would have come to a lowly, non-Arab *mawlat* for instruction. According to the Sufi biographer Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani (d. 1038-9 CE), Thawri refused to teach Hadith to the indigenous Aramaic-speaking people (*al-Nabat*) of Iraq or to people of the lower classes. He said, "Real Tradition is sought only among the Arabs. If knowledge is disseminated to the Aramaic-speaking people or the lower classes they will pervert it (*fa-qalabu al-'ilm*)."[57]

Jahiz provides further confirmation of Rabi'a's high status in *Kitab al-hayawan*. In this work, she is classified as one of the "Ascetic Ritualists and Renunciants among the Prominent Sunni Women of Asceticism and Leadership" (*al-nasikat al-mutazahhidat min al-nisa' al-madhkurat fi-l-zuhd wa-l-riyasa min nisa' al-jama'a*).[58] Three terms in this statement are significant. The first is *riyasa*, "leadership." Rabi'a is mentioned by Jahiz along with Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya and Umm al-Darda', Sunni women ascetics of Basra who were known for their high standards of morality and ethics. Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya (d. 702 CE) came from the same

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[55] Ahmad Amin, *Duha al-Islam* (Cairo: Egyptian National Book Organization, 1997 [reprint of 1933 first edition]), 117. Amin's positive view of the position of the *hurra* in early Abbasid society differs from that of Margaret Smith, who contends, "Muslim men preferred slaves as wives, because of the independent spirit of free Arab women." Idem, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 155 and (Rainbow Bridge), 126

[56] Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "Women and Politics in Late Jahili and Early Islamic Arabia: Reading Behind Patriarchal History," in Sonbol, ed., *Gulf Women*, 76.

[57] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 6, 369; according to Pellat, *Nabati* was a pejorative term that was applied both to the native residents of Basra and its environs, and to the residents of the Sawad marshlands, the ancestors of today's Marsh Arabs. See Pellat, *Le Mileu Basrien*, 22.

[58] Jahiz, *al-Hayawan*, vol. 5, 589; for a discussion of the translation of *nasik* (fem. *nasika*) as "ascetic ritualist" and *mutazahhid* as "renunciant," see Chapter 2.

Arab clan as Rabi'a. As we shall see in Chapter 2, her claim to leadership was based in part on her founding a school of women's asceticism.[59] Umm al-Darda' (d. 699 CE) was a *hurra* who spent much of her life in Syria but died in Basra. Known as "Umm al-Darda' *al-'Alima* (The Authority)", she was the wife of Abu al-Darda' (d. 651-52 CE), a noted companion of the Prophet Muhammad. Abu al-Darda' was a member of the committee appointed by the Caliph 'Uthman to compile the official version of the Qur'an.[60] Both Mu'adha and Umm al-Darda' had impeccable Arab and Islamic credentials and were exemplars of piety and self-restraint. Including Rabi'a among them meant that for Jahiz she shared their status and authority as honored bearers of tradition. In addition, Rabi'a shared with Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya the vocation of teaching, which also confirmed her leadership in her community.

c. Rabi'a the Sunni Muslim

The second important term in Jahiz's statement is *nisa' al-jama'a*, which literally means, "the women of the majority." This term refers to the fact that Jahiz considered Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya, Umm al-Darda' and Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as Sunni Muslims. The full title of the Sunni sect in Islam is *Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a*, "The People of the Sunna and the Majority." Including Rabi'a among famous Sunni women meant that she was not considered a heretic and that her religious practices were within the bounds of Sunni piety. In *al-Bayan wa-l-tabyin* Jahiz distinguishes these three women from other women who were either Kharijites (*nisa' al-khawarij*) or extremist Shiites (*nisa' al-ghaliya*). Although these other women were also pious ascetics, they followed doctrines that were unacceptable to the majority.[61] Hence, they could serve as rhetorical models for Jahiz but they could not serve as religious or moral exemplars.

The final term of significance in Jahiz's categorization of Rabi'a is *nasika*, "female ascetic ritualist." This term is further qualified by the word that comes after it, *mutazahhida*, "female renunciant." The Arabic root *n-s-k* is ambiguous, and carries meanings related to both worship and sacrifice.[62] With regard to worship, it implies a strict adherence to ritual. For example, the rites of the Hajj pilgrimage are known in Arabic as *manasik al-Hajj*. This sense of *n-s-k* is also found in the Qur'an, where it appears in the verse, "My prayer and my ritual sacrifice (*nusuki*) and my life and my death are for God, the Lord of the Worlds" (Qur'an 6:162). This Qur'anic verse became a sort of motto for early Muslim ascetics, because it alludes to the self-sacrifice that comes from devoting oneself God. Both Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya and Umm al-Darda' were known for their self-sacrifice. Mu'adha's husband Sila ibn Ushaym al-'Adawi (d. 694-5 CE) died as a martyr in the wars of the Umayyad Empire against the Byzantines. Umm al-

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[59] The earliest extant notice on Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya is in Muhammad ibn Sa'd (d. 845 CE), *al-Tabaqat al-kubra*, ed. Riyad 'Abdallah 'Abd al-Hadi (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1985), vol. 8, 483. This work portrays Mu'adha as teaching a group of women, who sit in a circle around her.

[60] Dhahabi, *Siyar*, vol. 6, 336-39

[61] Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 1, 194

[62] For an excellent discussion of the Qur'anic meaning of *n-s-k* see Rosalind Ward Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an; God's Arguments* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 14-16.

Darda's husband Abu al-Darda' died in an epidemic. Umm al-Darda' also appears in Islamic texts as an advocate of the spiritual benefits of visiting graveyards.[63]

Although Rabi'a was never married and never lost a loved one in battle, her celibacy was regarded as a sacrifice for the sake of God. Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur is the earliest writer to testify to Rabi'a's celibacy. In *Balaghat al*-nisa' she is asked, "Marriage is a requirement of God, the Glorious and Mighty. So why do you not marry?" Rabi'a replies: "The requirement of [devotion to] God prevents me from fulfilling another of his requirements."[64] Personal sacrifices such as these would have helped make Rabi'a worthy to receive divine favor and would have legitimized her status as a model of virtue. Jahiz further reinforces this image in two passages in *Kitab al-hayawan*, where Rabi'a's scrupulousness and self-discipline are cited as examples of the steadfastness of human nature.[65] Her reputation was so spotless that no one could imagine her falling victim to ordinary human weaknesses.

d. Rabi'a the Eloquent

The final important reference to Rabi'a in Jahiz is in *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin*, where she appears in a section titled "Mention of the Ascetic Ritualists and Renunciants among the People of *Bayan*" (*dhikr al-nussak wa-l-zuhhad min ahl al-bayan*).[66] Here, Rabi'a again appears in the company of Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya and Umm al-Darda'. Also as before, these three women are distinguished from Kharijite and Shiite women that are included in the same category. In this passage, however, the names of these women precede a list of Men of *Bayan* that includes preachers, poets, sages, leaders, and teachers. Included among the Men of *Bayan* are "Sufis (*al-Sufiyya*) among the Ascetic Ritualists who are known for the fineness of their speech (*mimman yujidu al-kalam*)."[67] Obviously, the term *al-bayan* was important for Jahiz and it is significant that Rabi'a is characterized by it. What did Jahiz mean by *bayan* and what did it mean to include Rabi'a in this category?

The term *al-bayan* as used by Jahiz means "demonstrative argument." For Jahiz, this meaning of *bayan* is derived from the Qur'an, where the term is used to designate God's proofs for his own existence. Muslim exegetes have also understood *al-bayan* to mean the ability to come to a clear understanding of the signs (*ayat*) of God as expressed in the Qur'an. Those who prefer this latter interpretation cite a passage from *Surat al-Rahman* (The Beneficent): "[God] created the human being; He taught him *al-bayan*" (Qur'an, 55:34). Others have interpreted this

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[63] See Abu Muhammad 'Abdallah ibn Qutayba al-Dinawari (d. 889-90 CE), *Kitab 'Uyun al-akhbar* (The Wellsprings of Knowledge), ed. Muhammad al-Iskandarani (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1999), vols. 1-2 combined, 737. In this passage a man says to Umm al-Darda': "Verily in my heart I have found a disease for which there is no cure; I have found great suffering and have lost all hope." She replies, "Go up to the graveyard and contemplate the dead." This account originally came from Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 3, 81.

[64] Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, *Balaghat al-nisa'*, 204; the person who transmitted this account was Muhammad ibn Bayan ibn Humran al-Mada'ini (fl. mid-ninth century CE). *Al-Mada'in* (The Cities) is the Arabic name for the former Persian capital of Ctesiphon, near Baghdad. Mada'ini's father was a student of Sufyan al-Thawri. Thus, it is possible that Thawri himself was the original source of the account. For information on Mada'ini, see Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad*, vol. 2, 95-9.

[65] Jahiz, *al-Hayawan*, vol. 1, 170 and vol. 6, 52

[66] Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 1, 194

[67] Ibid, 195; the "Sufis" mentioned in this passage are Kilab, Kulayb, Hashim al-Awqas, Abu Hashim al-Sufi and Salih ibn 'Abd al-Jalil. They will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

passage to mean that God granted human beings the power of articulate thought and speech. For example, the modern Qur'an commentator Muhammad Asad utilizes this meaning of *bayan* in his English translation of the Qur'an. In a footnote to Qur'an, 55:34, he explains that *bayan* refers to the ability to clarify God's teachings conceptually:

> The term *al-bayan*— denoting "the means whereby a thing is [intellectually] circumscribed and made clear" (Raghib)— applies to both thought and speech inasmuch as it comprises the faculty of making a thing or an idea apparent to the mind and conceptually distinct from other things or ideas, as well as the power to express this cognition clearly in spoken or written language (*Taj al-'Arus*); hence, in the above context, [the term means]"articulate thought and speech", recalling the "knowledge of all names" (i.e. the faculty of conceptual thinking) with which man is endowed.[68]

In the opening chapter of *al-Bayan wa-l-tabyin*, Jahiz defines *al-bayan* as "the outward expression of the hidden meaning [of a concept]" (*al-dalala al-zahira 'ala al-ma'na al-khafi*).[69] This is not very different from Asad's understanding of the term as "the means whereby a thing is intellectually circumscribed and made clear." According to Jahiz, the connection between the concept of *bayan* and the clarification of meaning was already known to the Arabs before the revelation of the Qur'an. It was also known among certain groups of non-Arabs. Presumably, these non-Arabs included the Greeks, for Jahiz's discussion of *bayan* combines Arabic semantics with Greek logic.[70] Jahiz also defines *bayan* as "a collective term for anything that intuitively (*dun al-damir*) expresses the obscured meaning [of a concept] and strips away the veils so that the hearer arrives at its true understanding."[71]

The notion of *bayan* for Jahiz is similar to the pre-Islamic Stoic concept of the True. For the Stoics, the most important truths are not always discovered through formal arguments, but are sometimes revealed in flashes of insight.[72] Thus, the Stoic sage was both a master of Truth, which is discovered through demonstration and argument, and a master of the True, which is the immediate expression of that which is. According to A. A. Long, "[The Stoic sage] represents an ideal of language and rationality at one with reality, of truth discovered."[73] For Jahiz, the teacher of *bayan* serves the same function. The similarities between the notion of *bayan* for Jahiz and the Stoic concepts of Truth and the True are striking and deserve further investigation.[74]

For Jahiz, *bayan* involved more than just the clarification of meaning. As both a hermeneutical and a rhetorical method, it also combined the arts of interpretation and demonstration.[75] Thus, *tabyin*, the act of doing *bayan*, required both logical analysis and rhetorical demonstration. For Jahiz, as for the Stoics, the rhetorical arts of proof and persuasion

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[68] Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 824 n. 1.

[69] Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 1, 42

[70] See, for example, the discussion of Jahiz's hermeneutics in Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 104-8.

[71] Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 1, 42

[72] The appropriation of the Stoic approach to knowledge by early Sufis may be reflected in the title of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj's *Kitab al-luma' fi-l-tasawwuf* (Flashes of Insight into Sufism).

[73] A. A. Long, "Dialectic and the Stoic Sage," in *The Stoics*, ed. John M. Rist (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 114

[74] To cite another example, the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus defined dialectics as "knowledge of demonstrative procedures," much like Jahiz's *bayan*. See Ibid, 107.

[75] Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 1, 43

depended on logic, whose original meaning in Greek was "persuasion with words."[76] The ability to persuade others with words was seen both as a mark of eloquence and as a way of revealing the truth. Similarly, for Jahiz, the logical processes used in the arts of demonstration (*bayan*) and persuasion (*tabyin*) were two sides of the same coin. Rhetoric, as the art of persuasion, depended on the use of reason just as formal proofs did. In order to be effective, both demonstration and persuasion had to rely on logic and reason.

For Jahiz, the opposite of *bayan* was *'iyy*, "inexpressiveness." This term connotes a lack of conceptual ability and was used by Jahiz to characterize the discourse of the person who is unschooled in logic and rhetoric: "*Bayan* is sight whereas *'iyy* is blindness, just as knowledge is sight and ignorance is blindness. *Bayan* is a product of knowledge whereas *'iyy* is a product of ignorance."[77] Jahiz saw *bayan* as consisting of a three-way relation in which logic (*mantiq*), knowledge (*'ilm*), and reason (*'aql*) work together to reveal the truth: "Reason is the motivator of the spirit (*al-'aql ra'id al-ruh*); knowledge is the motivator of reason (*al-'ilm ra'id al-'aql*); *bayan* is the interpreter of knowledge (*al-bayan tarjuman al-'ilm*)."[78] Because *bayan* is the "interpreter" of knowledge, it requires the application of knowledge in practice, especially with regard to moral conduct and ethics. "The life of virtue lies in truthfulness; the life of the spirit lies in modesty; the life of wisdom lies in knowledge; the life of knowledge lies in *bayan*."[79]

Thus, for Jahiz to say that Rabi'a was one of the People of *Bayan* was highly significant. It meant that she was endowed with reason and possessed the ability to conceptualize and express important truths. For Jahiz, one who does not possess both knowledge and reason cannot practice *bayan*. In his works, Jahiz does not discuss Rabi'a's educational background. He does not say whether she studied under a teacher or whether she was self-educated. However, even if she was self-educated, she clearly accumulated enough knowledge of Qur'an, Hadith, and other Islamic teachings to comment authoritatively on them.[80]

Although Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur does not refer to Rabi'a as a Person of *Bayan*, the image that he portrays of her is very similar to that of Jahiz. In *Balaghat al-nisa'*, she is portrayed as one of the "Women of Authoritative Opinion" (*dhawat al-ra'y*).[81] This meant that she was considered qualified to give her own, independent interpretation of Islamic doctrines. Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's use of the term *ra'y* tells us that Rabi'a's teachings were not based on tradition alone but were also based on independent reasoning. Her teachings were considered authoritative, whether or not they were based on previous examples or precedents. This is probably why Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur refers to her as *Rabi'a al-Musma'iyya*, "Rabi'a the Woman Who Must Be Heard." For those who came to her for doctrinal and ethical advice, Rabi'a's

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[76] See Peter Kingsley, *Reality* (Inverness, California: The Golden Sufi Center, 2003), 141-4. The same sense of logic as deriving from "words" (Gr. *logoi*) can be found in the Arabic word for logic, *mantiq*. The root of this term is *n-t-q*, which means, "to utter, enunciate, or express."

[77] Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 1, 43

[78] Ibid

[79] Ibid

[80] Margaret Smith assumed that Rabi'a was self-educated (Idem, *Rabi'a* [One World], 71 and [Rainbow Bridge], 47). As we shall see in Chapters 2 and 3, this is contradicted by evidence (albeit isolated) that she may have had at least one teacher.

[81] See Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, *Balaghat al-nisa'*, 191. In this work, reports about Rabi'a appear in the chapter titled, "News of the Women of Authoritative Opinion and Their Eloquent Statements" (*Akhbar dhawat al-ra'y wa az-zarf minhunna*).

teachings constituted their own body of authoritative tradition. For Jahiz, a "woman who must be heard," and who embodied her own authoritative tradition, was a "person of *bayan*." For Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, these same attributes epitomized Rabi'a as a "woman of *ra'y*."

III. RABI'A THE TEACHER AND THE CULTURE OF *ADAB*

Jahiz's depiction of Rabi'a as a Person of *Bayan* and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's depiction of Rabi'a as a Woman of *Ra'y* are not only important historically. They are also important because they are relevant to an important trope about Rabi'a that is in the earliest sources. This is the trope of Rabi'a the Teacher. Rabi'a the Teacher and Rabi'a the Ascetic are the most important tropes that appear in the earliest sources. These tropes are also important for early Sufism. In his Book of Sufi Women Sulami relies on two principal informants for reports about Rabi'a the Teacher. One is Ja'far ibn Sulayman al-Dab'i (discussed above), who is the main source for Rabi'a's relationship with Sufyan al-Thawri. The other is Shayban ibn Farrukh al-Ubulli (d. 850-1 CE), a respected traditionist in the generation after Dab'i.[82] Although Shayban may have met Rabi'a in his youth, he most often relates accounts from others who knew her. For example, he is the source for the statement in the epigraph to this chapter where Sufyan al-Thawri says about Rabi'a: "Take me to the teacher (*mu'addiba*). For when I am apart from her, I can find no solace."[83]

Sulami's chapter on Rabi'a does not contain either of the terms *bayan* or *ra'y*. However, he supports Jahiz's depiction of Rabi'a as a Person of *Bayan* and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's depiction of Rabi'a as a Woman of *Ra'y* by illustrating her aphoristic style of teaching and by confirming that she was a source of both ethical and spiritual advice for Sufyan al-Thawri. As portrayed by Sulami, most of Rabi'a's teachings are ethical in nature and contain maxims or principles. This style of teaching goes back to classical antiquity. Like Jahiz's concept of *bayan*, it was also associated with the Stoics. According to Pierre Hadot, Stoic teachers taught lessons in which their students learned "a fundamental principle which is formulable in a few words, and extremely clear and simple, precisely so that it may remain easily accessible to the mind, and be applicable with the sureness and constancy of a reflex."[84]

The Stoic model of pedagogy described by Hadot is very similar to Rabi'a's approach to teaching, in which ethical and religious doctrines are expressed in short, to-the-point sayings. In his recent book on the history of the aphorism, James Geary lists five "laws of aphorisms" that can be used to describe Rabi'a's teaching method: (1) they are brief; (2) they are definitive; (3) they are personal; (4) they have a twist; (5) they are philosophical in nature.[85] Rabi'a's teachings, like aphorisms in general, were meant to challenge those who heard them. Each statement demanded a response. This response could either be the recognition of a shared insight or an outright rejection. In either case, however, these statements could not be ignored. "Inside an

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[82] Dhahabi, *Siyar*, vol. 11, 101-3. Shayban was said to have memorized over 50,000 hadiths.

[83] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 76; this is the first account to be transmitted with an *isnad* in Sulami's chapter on Rabi'a. When I published *Early Sufi Women*, it was not yet clear to me that Shayban ibn Farrukh, which is the name found in the *isnad* of this report, and Shayban al-Ubulli were the same person.

[84] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 84

[85] James Geary, *The World in a Phrase: A Brief History of the Aphorism* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), 8-20.

aphorism," says Geary, "it is minds that collide and the new matter that spins out at the speed of thought is that elusive thing we call wisdom."[86] This dialectical view of the aphorism once again brings to mind Jahiz's definition of *bayan*.

In Arabic, one of the terms for the type of aphorism used by Rabi'a in her teachings is *hikma* (pl. *hikam*), "wisdom-saying." Rabi'a's aphorisms were wisdom teachings. The teachings associated with Rabi'a in early Islamic literature were lessons in both theoretical and practical wisdom. As we shall see in Chapter 3, many of these sayings concern the love of God. Along with celibacy and self-sacrifice, the themes of honesty, wisdom, and love of God provide the foundation for the image of Rabi'a the Teacher that was to develop in later periods of Islamic history.

a. Rabi'a and Sufyan al-Thawri

When Sufayn al-Thawri said to Ja'far ibn Sulayman al-Dab'i, "Take me to the teacher," the word he used was not *ustadha*, the modern term for a woman teacher in Arabic, or *mu'allima*, "female instructor," but *mu'addiba*. The term *mu'addib* (fem. *mu'addiba*) has a rich history in Arab culture and identifies Rabi'a not only as a teacher but more importantly as a personal mentor and specialist in *ta'dib*, ethical training and character formation. Both *mu'addiba* and *ta'dib* are related to the Arabic word *adab*, which refers most commonly to literature and the arts. However, in Rabi'a's time *adab* also included everything that was relevant to the formation of a complete personality, including piety, comportment, and ethics. Before discussing Rabi'a's depiction by Thawri as a *mu'addiba* and the implication of the culture of *adab* on her role as a teacher, it is first necessary to look at the circumstances in which these two famous religious figures may have come to know each other.

Sufyan al-Thawri was a noted jurist and traditionist, and was highly respected both inside and outside of early Sufi circles. An indication of his importance to Sufism can be seen in Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani's *Hilyat al-awliya'* (The Adornment of the Saints), one of the most important works of Sufi *tabaqat* literature. In the modern edition of this work, the chapter on Thawri is nearly 180 pages long. For Isfahani, Thawri is an important link in the chain of authorities that connects the Sufi tradition to the generation of *al-Salaf al-Salih*. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that Isfahani portrays him as the quintessential traditionist. He stands firmly in the ranks of the Hadith scholars and is devoted above all to maintaining the living example of the Prophet Muhammad. "Apart from fulfilling the requirements of religion," Isfahani quotes Thawri as saying, "there is no work more meritorious than seeking knowledge of traditions . . . We will keep on learning traditions as long as there are traditions left to learn."[87]

However, Sufyan al-Thawri was not just a traditionist. He was also a traditionalist. He rejected religious innovations as heretical and felt that the spiritual life depended on a scrupulous adherence to the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. For Thawri, tradition was not history to be memorized; rather, it was a set of behaviors to be lived. The bearer of tradition (*hamil al-'ilm*) was not only a Hadith scholar; he or she was also a person who lived according to the teachings of Hadith. To put it another way, the bearer of tradition was an activist

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[86] Ibid, 16
[87] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 6, 363

who assimilated, applied, and disseminated the Prophet's teachings. Thawri's motto with regard to this obligation was "Seek, Memorize, Act, Disseminate."[88] He was a popular teacher and attracted large crowds of both men and women to his lectures. During these lectures, he explained the meaning of problematical verses of the Qur'an, discoursed on Hadith, and interpreted points of law.[89] The "sound-bite" rhetorical style that Thawri used in such public gatherings is preserved in *Tafsir Sufyan al-Thawri* (The Qur'an Commentary of Sufyan al-Thawri). This work is less a formal exegesis of the Qur'an than a collection of comments on Qur'anic terms, phrases, and verses by the Prophet, his Companions, and their followers. Only seldom does one find the personal opinions of Thawri himself.[90]

When Thawri's traditionalism is considered along with his asceticism and uncompromising moralism, it becomes clear that he was one of those whom the historian of Islamic civilization Marshall Hodgson termed the "Piety-Minded": "Men and women for whom Islamic piety took precedence over any other interest."[91] In the early Abbasid period, the Piety-Minded formed, in Hodgson's words, an "exclusive and austere group" that demanded "a rigorous standard of public decency free of luxurious display or of other concessions to aristocratic culture that might be regarded, from an egalitarian viewpoint, as degenerate social corruption."[92] Transmitters of Hadith, the founders of early schools of Islamic jurisprudence, and ascetics such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya were members of this group. Basic to their worldview was the belief that each generation after the Prophet Muhammad was more corrupt than the last and that the only way to maintain an Islamic way of life was to hold fast to the example of the Prophet and *al-Salaf al-Salih*. This was certainly the case for Thawri, whose stubborn adherence to principle aroused the anger of the rulers of the day. By the time he supposedly met Rabi'a he had become cynical of the trappings of status and authority. His pessimistic moral vision is expressed in the following letter, whose contents were passed on by his nephew. Clearly, by this point in his life Thawri had lost his taste for activism and wanted nothing more than to be left alone.

> [The Prophet's generation] had knowledge that we do not have and they had a precedence that we do not have; so how are we to attain this [status] with our little knowledge, our little patience, our little support for the good, and with all the corruption among people and deceit in the world? So make the example (*amr*) of the first generation obligatory for yourself and hold fast to it; and require quietism (*khumul*), for this is the time for quietism. Require withdrawal from society (*'uzla*) and mix with people very little; for [in normal times] when people meet each other, some learn from others; but today, this is gone from us and salvation is in rejecting human company, as you can see. Beware not to befriend or associate with princes and their affairs; and beware not to deceive, lest you be told to intercede in matters of corruption or the redress of damages; for this is one of the ruses of Iblis (Satan); the corrupt reciters of the Qur'an take this upon themselves without any objection. It used to be said: "Beware of the ignorant worshipper and the

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[88] Ibid, 362

[89] Ibid, 357

[90] See, for example, Thawri's exegesis of Qur'an 2:96: Sufyan via a man (*'an rajulin*) from al-Hasan [al-Basri] on the statement of God, may He be exalted and glorified: "Our Lord, grant us good in this world and good in the Hereafter." [Hasan] said: "Good sustenance and beneficial work in the world;" ("And good in the Hereafter") [meaning] "until Heaven" (referring to verse 2:201). Thawri, *Tafsir Sufyan al-Thawri*, 65

[91] Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, 250

[92] Ibid, 365

corrupt scholar, for the strife that they cause is the source of all unrest." Do not take personal advantage from giving legal opinions and *fatwas* or compete with others over them. Be not as one who desires to be followed in his teachings, who wishes to have his teachings disseminated, or to have them heard; instead, leave this to the one who is suited for it. Beware not to love personal authority (*riyasa*), for authority is more beloved to a man than gold or silver. It is a blind alley (*bab ghamid*); no one can see his way through it except one with insight among the most accomplished of scholars and you will lose yourself in it. So live by your intentions, and know that anything that brings people close to you will lead to such an affair that a man will wish he were dead.[93]

The contents of this letter indicate that when Thawri may met Rabi'a he would have been a bitter and disillusioned man, which adds meaning to his statement that when he was apart from her, he could find no solace.[94] Thawri's sojourn in Basra was short and took place only in the last three years of his life. The Hanbalite prosopographer Ibn al-Jawzi reports that Thawri "went into hiding" in Basra during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdi.[95] Since the caliphate of al-Mahdi started in 775 CE, and Thawri died in 778 CE, this meant that he could not have associated with Rabi'a for more than three years. The picture that Ibn al-Jawzi paints of Thawri is of a man who constantly fears death or torture, who seems to suffer from either kidney or bladder cancer, and is prone to weeping.[96] In Basra, he appears to have had no home of his own but lived off the generosity of his students.[97] He was also known for constantly imploring God to grant him peace and security.[98] In several accounts, he blames his misfortunes on his status as a scholar, saying, "Were I not so learned, I would not be so sad."[99] Other authors, including Isfahani, confirm Thawri's disillusionment with scholarship. In *Hilyat al-awliya'* Thawri complains, "He who increases his knowledge increases his pain." He also said, "I wanted to escape from this affair [i.e., the politics of scholarship] completely, so that it would neither harm me nor benefit me."[100]

In the period in which he would have known Rabi'a, Thawri was apparently at the end of his rope. Why was this so? Why was he in so much trouble? Although the sources are not explicit on this matter, a number of clues can be found. Most sources indicate that Thawri's problems were political, and that his outspokenness only added to his misfortunes. The most likely explanation for his political problems is that they were due to his Shiite sympathies and his disapproval of the ethical standards of the Abbasid regime. Some evidence for Thawri's pro-

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[93] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 6, 376-7

[94] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 76

[95] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 571; this is confirmed by Ibn al-Nadim. See Abu al-Faraj Muhammad ibn Abi Ya'qub Ishaq al-Ma'ruf bi al-Warraq, *Kitab al-Fihrist li-l-Nadim*, ed. Rida ibn 'Ali ibn Zayn al-'Abidin al-Ha'iri al-Mazandarani Tajaddud (Beirut: Dar al-Masira, 1988), 281.

[96] Two accounts in Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa* claim that Sufyan al-Thawri urinated blood. Ibn al-Jawzi attributes this to either his deep thinking ("Whenever he started to think, he urinated blood") or his deep sadness ("This man has destroyed his liver from sadness"). See idem, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 570.

[97] See, for example, Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 6, 371, where Thawri's student 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Mahdi, in whose house Thawri died, finds the words, "Allah will suffice for you" written on his teacher's body. Another account (Ibid, 364) reports that in Basra Thawri had a map (*kharita*) written on his shirt. This may have helped him find safe houses in which to hide.

[98] The original source for these accounts is Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-kubra*, vols. 5-6, 538-9; see also, Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 76,

[99] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 569

[100] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 6, 363

Shiite sympathies can be found in the text of *Tafsir Sufyan al-Thawri*. Although this work contains commentaries by many prominent Sunni Muslims, a few commentaries come from figures primarily associated with Shiism, such as Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 731 CE). During Thawri's lifetime, the Abbasids were in a bitter dispute with the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. If Thawri had truly been a supporter of the Abbasids as is claimed by Isfahani and other Sufi writers, it would have been unusual for him to report traditions from a Shiite Imam whose descendants were rivals of the Abbasids. One also gets the impression that the Hanbali scholar Ibn al-Jawzi's unflattering portrayal of Sufyan al-Thawri was due to his mistrust of Thawri's professed loyalty to Sunni Islam.

The tenth-century CE bibliographer Muhammad ibn al-Nadim, who was a Shiite, claimed that Thawri belonged to the Zaydi sect of Shiism.[101] He also reports that many traditionists of the early Abbasid era were Zaydi as well.[102] Zaydi Shiites came in many varieties and are difficult to classify doctrinally. The main principle of Zaydism was that the leadership of Islam should be limited to the descendants of the Prophet's daughter Fatima (d. 633 CE) and her husband 'Ali through either of their sons Hasan (d. 669 CE) or Husayn (d. 680 CE). Any descendant of 'Ali and Fatima who was learned, pious, and who raised his banner in defense of justice had the right to claim leadership over Islam. Zaydi Shiism was named after Zayd ibn 'Ali (d. 740 CE), a son of the fourth Shiite Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (d. 717 CE). Zayn al-'Abidin was the only male survivor of the massacre at Karbala in which his father Imam Husayn was killed. He lived quietly in Medina and did not take part in political disputes. However, his son Zayd led an unsuccessful revolt against the Umayyads. Unlike other Shiite groups, the Zaydis did not reject the Caliphs Abu Bakr (d. 634 CE) and 'Umar (d. 644 CE). Although they felt that 'Ali was better suited for leadership, they accepted the first two Sunni Caliphs because 'Ali himself had chosen not to oppose them.[103] In most of their doctrines, the Zaydis were little different from the Sunnis. In their practice of jurisprudence and adherence to tradition they shared much in common with the piety-minded Sunni scholars discussed above.

In the early Abbasid period, Zaydi Shiism provided an opportunity for the descendants of Imam Hasan to assert their claims to leadership. The Hasanids claimed that in coming to power the Abbasids had usurped the rights of the Prophet's immediate family. This dispute came to a head during the Caliphate of Abu Ja'far al-Mansur (r. 754-775 CE), and led to the arrest of many Hasanids, including 'Abdallah al-Kamil (The Perfect), who died in prison in 761 CE. Over the next two years, al-Mansur was forced to deal with 'Abdallah al-Kamil's sons, who swore revenge for the death of their father. Muhammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya (The Pure Soul) revolted against al-Mansur in Medina and died in 762 CE; his brother Ibrahim was killed the following year and his other brother Idris escaped to Morocco, where he received the allegiance of the indigenous Amazigh (Berber) people. Idris was eventually killed by assassins sent by the Caliph Harun al-Rashid (d. 809 CE).

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[101] Dodge, *Fihrist*, vol. 1, 443; see also the Arabic edition of al-Nadim, *Kitab al-Fihrist*, Tajaddud edition, 226.

[102] Ibid, 444, Arabic edition, 226

[103] For an introduction to Zaydi doctrines, see William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), 162-6. This work was originally published in 1949 as *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam*.

Sunni sources that discuss Sufyan al-Thawri's career ignore Ibn al-Nadim's claim that he was Zaydi. However, since the Zaydi revolts occurred near the end of Thawri's life, they provide a likely context for the enmity of the Abbasid caliphs toward him. Thawri's opposition to the Abbasids is unmistakable in the following account, which indicates that he was already under suspicion when he and his colleague, the Syrian jurist Abu 'Amr al-Awza'i (d. 773 CE) visited Mecca for the Hajj pilgrimage.

> Mufaddal ibn Muhalhal said: I went to perform the Hajj with Sufyan, and when we went to Mecca, al-Awza'i joined us. Awza'i and Sufyan gathered with us in our house. At that time 'Abd al-Samad ibn 'Ali al-Hashimi was responsible for the pilgrimage. He knocked at the door of the house and we said, "Who is it?" "The Emir," he replied. Then Thawri got up and went into the antechamber. Awza'i rose and greeted [the Emir] and 'Abd al-Samad ibn 'Ali said to him, "Who are you, oh Shaykh?" He said, "I am Abu 'Amr al-Awza'i." "May God make you live long and in peace!" he said. "Your letters have already reached us and we have seen to your needs. But what has Sufyan al-Thawri done?" "He has gone into the antechamber," Awza'i replied. Then he went in after him and said, "This man wants only you." Sufyan came out with a frown on his face and said, "Peace be upon you. How are you?" 'Abd al-Samad ibn 'Ali said to him: "Oh Abu 'Abdallah, I have come to you so that I might record the proper rituals [of the pilgrimage] from you." Sufyan said to him: "Why don't I show you something that is better for you?" "What is that?" he asked. "Say what you really want." He said: "What am I to do about the Commander of the Believers Abu Ja'far [al-Mansur]?" Thawri replied: "If you really desire God, then God will take care of Abu Ja'far for you." Then Awza'i said to him, "Oh Abu 'Abdallah. These men are from the tribe of Quraysh and they don't want anything but praise from us." Thawri replied: "Oh Abu 'Amr. Verily we cannot beat them, so we have to train them (*fa innama nu'addibuhum*) in the way that you see." Mufaddal said: Then I turned toward Awza'i and he said to me: "Let's get out of here. For I am sure that this one will send someone to put a rope around our necks." And what I predicted actually happened.[104]

Other accounts confirm that Thawri's opposition to the Abbasids caused him to be in danger of losing his life. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 1071 CE) reports that in 775 CE the Caliph al-Mansur resolved to go to Mecca, where Thawri was then living, and crucify him for sedition. The carpenters had already started to construct the platform on which he would be executed. According to Baghdadi's account, when Thawri was called to present himself to the authorities, his head was in the lap of Fudayl ibn 'Iyad and his feet were in the lap of Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna. "Oh Abu 'Abdullah," they said to him, "Fear Allah and do not allow the enemy to deceive us." Thawri said, "We do not have to worry about Abu Ja'far [al-Mansur] ever entering Mecca." When Thawri was later told that al-Mansur had died before he could travel to Mecca, he denied that he had predicted the caliph's death.[105]

The person in whose lap Thawri rested his head was the famous ascetic Fudayl ibn 'Iyad (d. 807 CE), of the Banu Tamim tribe of Kufa. He was born, however, in Central Asia. Most accounts about Fudayl claim that he was a highwayman earlier in life. Yet even as a highwayman, he was of a noble disposition. He would not rob a poor person or a caravan that contained a woman. After repenting and becoming an ascetic, he went first to Kufa and then to

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[104] Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad*, vol. 9, 160   Although Awza'i eventually made peace with the Abbasids he was closely associated with the last rulers of the Damascus-based Umayyad dynasty of Caliphs, and lived under suspicion until the end of his life.
[105] Ibid

Mecca, where he spent the last decades of his life.[106] Although Fudayl was not a Shiite, his
concern for the poor was a hallmark of early Shiism. Thawri's attitude toward the poor was more
equivocal. Despite Isfahani's claim that he refused to teach Hadith to Aramaic-speaking Iraqis
and the lower classes, other reports say that he favored the poor over the rich in his teaching
sessions. According to one account recorded by Isfahani, a person who attended Thawri's
sessions said: "I have not seen the rich more reviled than at the session of Sufyan al-Thawri; and I
have not seen the poor more glorified than at the session of Sufyan al-Thawri."[107]

The person in whose lap Thawri rested his feet was Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna (d. 814 CE), a
mawla of the Banu Hilal tribe of Qays. Ibn 'Uyayna was born in Kufa. His father was a client of
the Umayyad governor of Iraq, and he was forced to move to Mecca after his father's patron was
overthrown. Of probable Jewish origin, he was a major source of Jewish apocryphal accounts
(*Isra'iliyyat*) that served as supplements to Qur'an and Hadith.[108] In the *Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadim
identifies Ibn 'Uyayna as a Zaydi Shiite along with Thawri.[109] This claim is indirectly supported
by his birth in Kufa, which was traditionally a Shiite city, although Sunnis could be found there
as well. Sufyan al-Thawri was also from Kufa. However, although Thawri was sympathetic to
the Shiites and may have been a Zaydi, he rejected the extremism of many Shiite groups and
spoke out forcefully against them. At one point, he complained that the *Rawafid* (Shiite rejecters
of the first three Sunni caliphs) had gone so far in their extremism that he was ashamed even to
mention the virtues of Imam 'Ali.[110]

The above biographical information about Sufyan al-Thawri adds an important level of
context to the depictions of his encounters with Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. For example, when Thawri
and Dab'i go to Rabi'a in one account related by Sulami, Thawri raises his hands and prays, "Oh
God, grant me safety!" Isfahani corroborates that this was a common habit of Thawri's. When
he does this in Rabi'a's presence, however, she weeps. "What makes you weep?" Thawri asks.
"You make me weep," she replies. "How?" he asks. She says, "Have you not learned that true
safety from the world is to abandon all that is in it? So how can you ask for such a thing while
you are still soiled with the world?"[111] Some readers would probably interpret this statement as a
comment on the virtues of the ascetic life. However, we can now see that it may have meant
something quite different. Because of Thawri's opposition to the Abbasid regime, he may have
been asking God for safety from those who sought to persecute him. Thus, Rabi'a may have
wept out of real compassion for Thawri's misfortunes. Because they were nearly the same age
when they knew each other, Thawri is depicted as seeking solace from Rabi'a as he would from a
sister, and found comfort in her concern for his misfortunes. Nevertheless, Rabi'a does not spare
Thawri the "tough love" that he needs. She informs him that the real tragedy is that he has
brought his misfortune upon himself. Even in this desperate situation, he is soiled with the affairs

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[106] On Fudayl ibn 'Iyad see Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 8, 84-139 and Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 237-47.
He was one of the most famous proto-Sufis and can be found in many other sources as well.
[107] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 6, 365
[108] See Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 8, 270-318 and Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 231-7. See also, Morony,
Iraq after the Muslim Conquest, 81, and Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, 75-6.
[109] Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim*, vol. 1, 443; Tajaddud Arabic edition 226
[110] Dhahabi, *Siyar*, vol. 7, 253
[111] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 76

of the world. His political activism and confrontational attitude have made him vulnerable to suffering, despite his denial of the world through his asceticism and high ethical standards. In another account reported by Sulami, Thawri comes to Rabi'a and asks, "What is the best way for the slave to come close to God, the Glorious and Mighty?" Rabi'a weeps again and replies: "How can the likes of me be asked such a thing? The best way for the slave to come close to God Most High is for him to know that he must not love anything in this world or the Hereafter other than God."[112] In another account, Thawri comes to Rabi'a and complains, "How sorrowful I am!" Again, Rabi'a cures his self-pity by rebuking him: "Do not lie!" she says. "Say instead: 'How little is my sorrow!' If you were truly sorrowful, life itself would not please you." "My sorrow," explains Rabi'a, "is not from feeling sad. Rather, my sorrow is from not feeling sad enough."[113]

Some of Rabi'a's statements in Sulami's Book of Sufi Women may be read as covert or indirect moral lessons for Thawri. In one such account, she comes across the body of a man who has been crucified for immorality. She says to the corpse: "Upon my father! With that tongue you used to say: 'There is no god but God!'" A narrator named "Sufyan" (it is unclear whether Sufyan al-Thawri or Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna is intended) adds, "Then she mentioned the good works that the man had done."[114] This lesson may have been meant as a consolation for Thawri. In effect, Rabi'a is saying that no matter how bad one's end may be, or for what crime one is convicted, a person's good works will be remembered after him. It also recounts the popular belief among Muslims that the mere act of saying the *Shahada*, "There is no god but God," leaves the door open to salvation, even for the worst criminals.

Sulami relates a similar account about Rabi'a and Salih al-Murri (d. 792-93 CE), another ascetic from Basra.[115] In this story, Murri comes to Rabi'a and paraphrases a famous saying of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:7-8): "He who persists in knocking at the door will have it opened for him." Rabi'a replies: "The door is already open. But the question is, who wishes to enter it?"[116] In another version of this account that appears in Sulami's *Kitab 'uyub al-nafs wa mudawatiha* (Book of the Faults of the Soul and Their Cures), Rabi'a is much harsher with Murri: "The door, oh worthless one (*ya battal*), is open, but you run away from it! How will you arrive at a goal whose path has been laid out for you from the first step? How is the slave to save himself from the faults of his soul when his own desires have caused them? And how is one to save himself from following his desires when he cannot avoid acting in a contradictory manner?"[117] Rabi'a's message is clear: The door to your salvation is open. If you really want to enter, you know what to do.

b. Ta'dib: *The Art of Character Formation*

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[112] Ibid, 80

[113] Ibid

[114] Ibid

[115] On Salih al-Murri see Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 6, 165-77. On his knowledge of the Qur'an see 'Abdullah ibn Mubarak al-Marwazi (d. 797 CE), *Kitab al-zuhd wa yalihi Kitab al-raqa'iq*, ed. Habib al-Rahman al-'Azmi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.). Ibn Mubarak studied briefly under Sufyan al-Thawri and transmitted many of Thawri's exegetical comments on the Qur'an.

[116] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 80

[117] Pourjavady, *Majmu'at Sulami* (*Kitab 'uyub al-nafs*), 72-73

The style of teaching that Rabi'a used with Sufyan al-Thawri and Salih al-Murri was called *ta'dib*: literally, "training." This concept is also used by Thawri in the account from *Tarikh Baghdad* where he explains to the jurist Awza'i how he intended to train the Abbasids by putting them in their place: "Verily we cannot beat them, so we have to train them" (*fa innama nu'addibuhum*). The teacher of *ta'dib* was a *mu'addib*, literally, "a trainer." In the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods, this type of teaching supplemented other, more formal types of education. Sometimes, the term *ta'dib* was used to describe the type of training that comes from experience: what today would be called "the school of hard knocks." This is illustrated in the statement used in the second epigraph of this chapter, where the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid remarks: "He who is not educated by virtue (*man lam yu'addibhu al-jamil*) is reformed by tribulations."[118] It can also be observed in the Arab saying, "Time suffices as a teacher; reason suffices as a guide (*kafa bi-l-dahri mu'addiban wa bi-l-'aqli murshidan*)."[119] The key verb in these aphorisms, *addaba*, is an Arabic cognate with *mu'addiba*, the word used by Thawri to describe Rabi'a the Teacher. *Rabi'a al-Mu'addiba* is thus a female trainer, a woman who teaches *adab*. In the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, *adab* stood for an entire culture of conduct that combined Arab, Persian, and Greek ideals.[120]

According to the lexicographer E. W. Lane, the basic meaning of *adab* is "discipline of the mind and good qualities and attributes of the mind or soul." *Adab* "invites men to the acquisition of praiseworthy qualities and dispositions, and forbids them from acquiring such as are evil."[121] Under the influence of the courtier Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 759 CE), who wrote two treatises on *adab*, the term eventually came to be understood as an ethic of self-presentation, which included the virtues of eloquence, courtesy, prudence, and self-restraint.[122] For Ibn al-Muqaffa', *adab* stood more for the character that one earned and the honor that one achieved than the position into which one was born. "If people honor you for money or power, it should not please you," he said, "for honor can be lost with the loss of these things. Instead, it should please you only if they honor you for religion or for *adab*."[123] In his books on *adab* and advice to rulers, Ibn al-Muqaffa' created a model of self-presentation that sought to combine the best characteristics of Persian aristocratic culture and the more individualistic culture of the Arabs. In subsequent generations, books on various types of *adab* were written following Ibn al-Muqaffa's model: there was an *adab* for princes, an *adab* for court officials, an *adab* of literature, and even

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[118] Abu 'Umar Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd Rabbih al-Andalusi (d. 940 CE), *Kitab al-'iqd al-farid* (The Unique Necklace), ed. Ibrahim al-Abyari (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1990), vol. 5, 61

[119] Ibid, vol. 2, 237

[120] In *The Attainment of Happiness* (*Tahsil al-Sa'ada*) the philosopher Abu Nasr al-Farabi (d. 950 CE) uses the term *ta'dib* to describe the training of the Young Guardians in Plato's *Republic*. Here the term also means "character formation" and is contrasted with "instruction" (*ta'lim*). According to Joshua Parens, for Farabi, "the hallmark of *ta'dib* is 'habituation' (*ta'awwud*)." See Joshua Parens, *An islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions: Itroducing Alfarabi* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 32-33.

[121] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, 35

[122] See Michael Cooperson, "Ibn al-Muqaffa'," *Dictionary of Literary Biography Volume 311: Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, 156-8.

[123] Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-farid*, vol. 2, 412

an *adab* for seekers on the Sufi path (*adab al-sufiyya*). The Persian Sufi Sulami, who created the trope of Rabi'a as the quintessential Sufi woman, wrote one of the first Sufi treatises on *adab*.[124]

In his discussion of *adab* in *The Venture of Islam*, Marshall Hodgson stresses the non-Arab roots of the culture of the *adib*, the courtly practitioner of *adab*. Hodgson viewed *adab* as a form of secular culture; it drew heavily on Pre-Islamic models of conduct that came from Greek philosophy and Sasanian Persian aristocratic traditions. According to Hodgson, the secular culture of the *adib* was opposed by the Piety-Minded, who "looked to the moralistic and populistic strains in the Irano-Semitic background" for their models of behavior.[125] For Hodgson, the ideals of religion and *adab* stood at opposite poles. Religion represented the moralism of Islam's Semitic origins, whereas *adab* represented the urbane and literate traditions of non-Semitic peoples, such as Greeks, Persians, and Indians.

Hodgson's view of *adab* works only if one conceives of *adab* in terms of high culture and belles-lettres. Writers such as Ibn al-Muqaffa', who translated Indian works into Arabic, or Jahiz, who was a master stylist and was strongly influenced by court fashions, fit such a pattern. However, Hodgson's emphasis on the non-Arab origins of *adab* caused him to overlook the important role that *adab* played in Arab society, both before and after the coming of Islam. Most importantly, his emphasis on the secular nature of *adab* culture caused him to ignore the importance of this concept among the Piety-Minded. Sources such as Isfahani's *Hilyat al-awliya'* and other early works on the ascetic tradition of Islam reveal that the Piety-Minded had their own version of *adab* culture. The trope of Rabi'a the Teacher, which comes from the culture of the Piety-Minded, draws heavily on Arab and pietistic notions of *adab*. The *adab* of the religious teacher-trainer (*mu'addib*) may not have been the same as the *adab* of the litterateur (*adib*) as Hodgson imagined, but it was still part of the culture of *adab*. A more accurate picture of *adab* in the late Umayyad and early Abbasid periods emerges when one realizes that the language of *adab* was multivalent: a single term could have different meanings. While both the courtier and the teacher-trainer cultivated *adab* through the pedagogy of *ta'dib*, the type of *adab* that was taught in each case was different.

    c. Adab *and the Virtues:* Muruwwa *and* Hilm

In Pre-Islamic Arabia, *adab* was associated with a concept of virtue known as *muruwwa*.[126] In Arabic, *muruwwa* means "manliness;" hence, the term reflected a notion of virtue that was based on the ideal behavior of the mature male. Pre-Islamic *muruwwa* put a high value on the virtues of courage and loyalty, particularly toward one's clan or kin group. However, these virtues were not to be expressed rashly. Instead, they needed to be tempered with the good judgment that came from maturity and experience. The key to good judgment was sound reason (*'aql*). In the words of the Prophet Muhammad: "He who does not have *adab* does not have reason (*'aql*)."[127] The set of virtues associated with *muruwwa* and the use of sound

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[124] See Sulami, *Jawami' adab al-sufiyya*, ed. Nasrollah Pourjavady (op. cit.).

[125] Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, 451-2

[126] On the concept of *muruwwa* in Pre-Islamic Arabia, see Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969 [reprint of 1914 first edition]), 82-100. This term may also be transliterated as *muru'a*.

[127] Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-farid*, vol. 2, 415

reason was expressed by the Arabic term *hilm*. The *halim*, the possessor of *hilm*, was a person who exercised good judgment, had a calm and balanced mind, and practiced self-restraint. The opposite of the *halim* was the *jahil*, the ignorant and impetuous person, who was driven by passion and was heedless of the consequences of his behavior.[128]

In the early Islamic period, the moral concepts of *adab*, *muruwwa*, and *hilm* were assimilated to the Islamic religious concept of faith (*iman*). For the Japanese scholar of Islam Toshihiko Isutzu, *hilm* was so important to the Islamic understanding of morality that he regarded the term as "the pre-religious, pre-Islamic form of the concept of *islam* itself."[129] Although it connoted an ethic of restraint, *hilm* was not a passive quality. In Isutzu's words: "There can be no *hilm* where there is no power. It is essentially a quality of a man who governs and dominates others, and not of those who are governed and dominated."[130] In the Qur'an, God is called *al-Halim*. This attribute means that God, although He is all-powerful, restrains Himself from acting as a tyrant. In most places where this term is used in the Qur'an, the attribute *al-Halim* is accompanied by the attribute *al-Ghafur*, "The Forgiving" (cf. Qur'an, 2:225). According to the Andalusian litterateur Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 940 CE), the person of faith (*mu'min*) is also a person of *hilm*: "Three things complete one's faith. When one is angry, his anger does not take him beyond the bounds of the truth. When he is pleased, his pleasure does not lead him toward oppression or immorality. When he has power he does not try to possess that which does not belong to him."[131] What is true of *hilm* is similarly true of *muruwwa*. Ibn 'Abd Rabbih quotes the Prophet Muhammad as saying, "There is no religion (*din*) without *muruwwa*."[132]

Virtues such as *muruwwa* and *hilm* were not just individual qualities. They were also seen as hereditary possessions that were acquired from one's ancestors, and certain tribes or clans were known for specific virtues. Among some groups of Arabs, such as the Pre-Islamic Christian town-dwellers of Hira in Iraq, the store of virtues might include piety and asceticism. The Christian Arabs of Hira were known collectively as *al-'Ibad*, literally "Slaves of God," and distinguished themselves by producing the oldest recorded poetry in the Arabic language.[133] Rabi'a's clan, 'Adi ibn Qays, were known for their asceticism as far back as the time of the Prophet Muhammad. In *Sifat al-safwa*, Ibn al-Jawzi reports that a contemporary of Rabi'a, the Basra traditionist Abu Sawwar al-'Adawi, boasted: "The people of Banu 'Adi are the most rigorous ascetics in this land! Here is Abu al-Sahba' [Sila ibn Ushaym al-'Adawi], who did not sleep during the night and did not eat during the day, and here is his wife Mu'adha bint 'Abdallah [al-'Adawiyya], who did not look up at the sky for forty years!"[134] This account implies that the historical Rabi'a would have been honored among her clan not only because of her personal piety and asceticism, but also because her religious practices conformed to a clan-based tradition of

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[128] Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer Company, 1987), 205; this work is a reprint of the 1964 first edition (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies).

[129] Ibid, 204

[130] Ibid, 207

[131] Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-Farid*, vol. 2, 264

[132] Ibid, 276; Ibn Qutayba, *'Uyun al-akhbar*, vol. 2, 340, attributes this saying to al-Hasan al-Basri.

[133] Nicholson, *Literary History of the Arabs*, 138

[134] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 22; this passage is translated in the Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 264.

asceticism. Paradoxically, her celibacy and asceticism, the characteristics that set her apart from other women of her day, were also "traditional" because they followed long-standing customs among her own people. Some clans produced kings, some clans produced poets; the clan of Banu 'Adi ibn Qays produced ascetics.

This last point is an important reminder of the cultural differences that separated the late Umayyad and early Abbasid periods in which Rabi'a lived, from later eras of Islamic history. This is especially important for the study of Sufism, because later Sufi writers tended to project the terminology and doctrinal usage of their own times back onto those, such as Rabi'a, who were seen as the founding figures of the Sufi tradition. It is also important to remember that Rabi'a lived in a time when the term, "Sufism" (*tasawwuf*) was little known and when important Sufi technical terms, such as *al-tariqa* (the way) were still unknown (see Chapter 4). Perhaps the clearest example of this difference can be found in the popularity of the term *muruwwa* in early Sufism. Within two centuries after Rabi'a's death, this ethical term of Arab origin would be replaced by *futuwwa*, an Arabized concept of Persian origin. Although the Arabic term *fata* ("youth") was often used in speech and appears once in the Qur'an (Qur'an, 21:60), the technical term *futuwwa* appears to be an Arabized version of the Persian *javanmardi*, "young manliness."

The introduction of the term, *futuwwa*, paralleled the growing influence of Persian culture in Abbasid society. Its adoption by Sufis seems to have symbolized the replacement of an Arab cultural ethic that saw virtue embodied in maturity and the wisdom of experience with a Persian cultural ethic that saw virtue embodied in the ideals of youth and noble innocence. Although Sufi traditions trace the use of the term *futuwwa* as far back as the Shiite Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765 CE), it did not come into historical notice until the ninth century CE and it was not used frequently until the tenth century CE. [135] It did not become firmly established as a Sufi concept until after the publication of Sulami's *Kitab al-futuwwa* at the end of the tenth century. [136]

d. Rabi'a's Way of Ta'dib

In order to view the figure of Rabi'a the Teacher in the context of her own time and place, we must be careful not to project later Sufi terms and practices back onto the past. Instead, we should view the teachings attributed to Rabi'a in the context of the culture of *adab* that existed in the late Umayyad and early Abbasid periods. This culture retained many of the notions of Pre-Islamic Arabia, including the notion that the purpose of *adab* was to build character. This view of *adab* as a means of character development was prominent among the Umayyads, who sent their princes to the Syrian Desert for moral and physical training. In the second half of the Umayyad period, from the caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (d. 705 CE), the *mu'addib* or personal mentor became a common figure at the Umayyad court. According to Philip Hitti, the traits that the Umayyads sought to acquire from *ta'dib* were courage, endurance, respect for the

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[135] On the origins of *futuwwa*, see Muhammad Ja'far Mahjub, "Chivalry and Early Persian Sufism," in *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rumi*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London and New York: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), 549-81.

[136] For an English translation of this work, see Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Sulami, *The Book of Sufi Chivalry: Lessons to a Son of the Moment*, Futuwwah, trans. Sheikh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Halveti (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1983).

rights of neighbors, manly virtue (*muruwwa*), generosity, hospitality, respect for women, and the fulfillment of promises.[137]

Among the Piety-Minded, the religious aspect of *adab* was epitomized in a statement that has often been attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, although it does not appear in the six canonical Hadith collections: "Verily Allah has trained me and has ennobled my character" (*inna Allaha addabani fa ahsana ta'dibi*).[138] Sulami cites as a source for this saying not the Prophet but the early Sufi Shaqiq al-Balkhi (d. 810 CE), a contemporary of Rabi'a and a noted ascetic of Afghanistan and Central Asia.[139] For specialists in *ta'dib* such as Rabi'a and Shaqiq, the Prophet was a "beautiful example" (*uswa hasana*, Qur'an, 33:61) whose *adab* provided a model for Muslims to follow. The early Sufi treatise *Kitab al-luma'* by Abu Nasr al-Sarraj contains a chapter titled, "The Book of the Example and Emulation of the Messenger of God" (*Kitab al-uswa wa-l-iqtida' bi-Rasul Allah*). In this chapter, Sarraj encourages Sufis to follow the Sunna of the Prophet as completely as possible, taking special care to acquire the Prophet's moral and spiritual states and inner consciousness.[140] It was necessary for Sufis to pattern their conduct on the *adab* of the Prophet because, in the words of a famous hadith from *Sahih Muslim*, "Verily the morals of the Messenger of God were of the Qur'an; he approved what it approved and he disliked what it disliked."[141]

Two centuries after Sarraj, the elements of the Prophet's *adab* were summarized by the Andalusian jurist Qadi 'Iyad ibn Musa al-Yahsubi (d. 1150 CE) in *Kitab al-Shifa' bi-ta'rif huquq al-Mustafa* (The Antidote in Knowing the Rights of the Chosen One). The author of this work was one of the foremost traditionists of the Islamic West and Chief Justice (*qadi al-jama'a*) of the cities of Granada in Spain and Sabta (Ceuta) in Morocco. His goal in writing this book was to restore ethical values by reorienting believers toward the practices of the early Muslim community. Thus, this work provides important details about the qualities and traits that were prized among early Muslims, including those in Rabi'a's time. For Qadi 'Iyad, the chief significance of the Prophet's example— apart from his purely religious role— was in the excellence of his character (*husn al-khuluq*). This was reflected in his "equanimity in strength of spirit" (*al-i'tidal fi quwwat al-nafs*), a trait that was seen as fundamental to the concept of *muruwwa*. The practical wisdom (*hilm*) of the Prophet was revealed in his moderation (*tawassut*) and in his ability to prioritize issues and put them in their proper place. Other traits that made the *adab* of the Prophet a good example for Muslims also resulted from *muruwwa*. These included forbearance, generosity, bravery, fellowship, sympathy, humility, dignity, justice, and the renunciation of worldly possessions. Assimilating these Prophetic traits, said Qadi 'Iyad, promises "eternal happiness to the person who patterns his conduct on them and makes them his own, for they are a portion of prophethood."[142]

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[137] Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 253

[138] Sulami, *Jawami' adab al-sufiyya*, 343; another version of this hadith states: "Verily Allah has trained me and has ennobled my *adab*" (*inna Allaha addabani fa ahsana adabi*).

[139] On Shaqiq al-Balkhi see Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 8, 58-73.

[140] Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 93-5

[141] See *Sahih Muslim*, Bab al-Musafirin, 139 for the first half of this hadith. Both the first and second portions of the hadith can be found in al-Qadi Abu al-Fadl 'Iyad al-Yahsubi, *al-Shifa bi-ta'rif huquq al-Mustafa* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1979), vol. 1, 96.

[142] Ibid, 96-106

Acquiring virtues such as these was the goal of the training that Rabi'a would have imparted to her students such as Sufyan al-Thawri. For the Piety-Minded, *adab* was built on religiously based moral qualities that when properly applied gave rise to the ethical maturity of *muruwwa*. The assimilation of the virtue of *muruwwa* led to *hilm*, the combination of justice, forbearance, and dignity that epitomized the mature Islamic personality. The final goal of *ta'dib* as character formation was the attainment of wisdom (*hikma*), which was expressed through the behaviors associated with *muruwwa* and *hilm*.

The view of the way of *ta'dib* that is attributed to Rabi'a agrees with Toshihiko Isutzu's view of ethics in early Islamic society. For Isutzu, this method of training "has in itself a latent possibility of being developed and elaborated philosophically into something close to the Hellenistic view of 'non-perturbation' based on the cultivation of autarchy" (i.e., a fully independent self).[143] Much like the teachings of the Hellenistic philosophers, the way of *ta'dib* that Rabi'a used to train her students was a complete method of character formation. It was based on a regime of disciplines that led to the cultivation of religious and social virtues, moral uprightness, and wisdom. In later generations, Sufis would call such a regime *al-Tariqa*, "the Way." However, for Rabi'a, who lived before the development of institutional Sufism, the term *tariqa* in this sense was unknown. For Rabi'a, her *ta'dib* was her *tariqa*. In other words, the *ta'dib* taught by Rabi'a the Teacher constituted the *Tariqa* before the Sufi *tariqa*.

The individual lessons of Rabi'a's way of *ta'dib* were made up of *masa'il* (sing. *mas'ala*), literally "topics" or teachings. This is what Sulami referred to when he stated that Sufyan al-Thawri sought *masa'il* from Rabi'a.[144] These *masa'il* were lessons in life, ethics, and spirituality that Thawri learned from Rabi'a in the form of aphorisms and other wisdom teachings. Numerous accounts from early Islam confirm that the term *mas'ala* commonly bore a pedagogical meaning and that it was often used to designate lessons or exercises of a moral or ethical nature. In *Hilyat al-awliya'*, the teachings of Rabi'a's contemporary Shaqiq al-Balkhi are also referred to as *masa'il*. In the pedagogical terminology of early Islam, *masa'il* were stepping-stones or stages on the path of ethical and spiritual development. Eventually, Sufis would use the term *maqam* ("stage" or "station") to designate such levels of formation. In Rabi'a's time, however, the stages of *ta'dib* were expressed conceptually as *masa'il*. Shaqiq al-Balkhi summarizes the process of ethical formation as a five-step program of *masa'il*. He said, "One should not sit at the feet of any person of knowledge unless he teaches him how to advance from five *masa'il* to five *masa'il*:

1. From doubt to certainty (*min al-shakk ila al-yaqin*);
2. From enmity to constructive advice (*min al-'adawa ila-l-nasiha*);
3. From arrogance to humility (*min al-kibr ila-l-tawadu'*);
4. From vanity to sincerity (*min al-riya' ila al-ikhlas*);

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[143] Isutzu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 211; Rabi'a's concept of the independent, spiritually mature self will be discussed in Chapter 4.

[144] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 74-5; In the Introduction to my edition of this work, I stressed the jurisprudential meaning of the term *masa'il* and characterized Rabi'a as teaching *fiqh al-mu'amalat* (the jurisprudence of interpersonal behavior), 63. I have now revised my opinion and believe that the term *mas'ala* is best understood in a pedagogical sense, as referring to the individual elements of Rabi'a's teachings.

5.   From desire to awe (*min al-raghba ila-l-rahba*)."[145]

        As a program of Islamic character development, the way of *ta'dib* combined the wisdom tradition of Pre-Islamic Arabia with the spirituality of the Qur'an and the Sunna. Culturally, the pedagogical method of early Muslim religious teachers such as Rabi'a and Shaqiq al-Balkhi was part of a Pan-Mediterranean tradition that put Islam in dialogue with early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism, and even (as we have already seen) with Greek philosophy. Early Muslim writers were aware of the similarities among these traditions. For example, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, an Andalusian litterateur who lived a century and a half after Rabi'a, associates *ta'dib* with the self-education of Jesus: "It was asked of Jesus the Son of Mary, 'Who trained you (*man addabaka*)?' 'No one trained me.' Jesus answered. 'Rather, I saw that ignorance (*jahl*) was bad so I avoided it.'"[146] In another aphorism, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih cites the Greek philosopher Diogenes (Ar. *Dijanis*). "Diogenes was asked, 'What traits are most useful at the end of one's life?' He replied: 'Faith in God, the Glorious and Mighty, the righteousness of one's parents, love for the scholars, and the acceptance of *adab*.'"[147]

        Despite the anachronistic content of this saying, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's citation of Diogenes (d. 323 BCE) is important because this famous Cynic philosopher was reputed to be an originator of the aphoristic style of teaching used by Rabi'a and other early Sufis.[148] The Greek word for "training" was *askesis*. Likewise, the Arabic word *ta'dib* also meant "training." For philosophers such as the Stoics, who followed a disciplined regime of character formation, philosophy was a form of *askesis*, a method of training for a complete way of life. Pierre Hadot summarizes the philosophical view of *askesis* in a way that closely resembles the notion of *ta'dib* as understood by Rabi'a and her contemporaries: "In their view, philosophy did not consist in teaching an abstract theory— much less in the exegesis of texts— but rather in the art of living. It is a concrete attitude and determinate life-style, which engages the whole of existence."[149]

        The Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus (d.101-2 CE) defined *askesis* as "the learning of the lessons appropriate to each and every excellence; practical training must follow invariably, if indeed from the lessons we have learned we hope to derive any benefit."[150] A similar view of pedagogy characterized the late Umayyad and early Abbasid approach to *ta'dib* as character development. In his treatise *On Askesis*, Musonius describes the character traits of the fully trained Stoic in terms that bring to mind the early Islamic notions of *adab*, *hilm*, and *muruwwa*. These traits included moderation, temperance, self-control, and detachment from worldly affairs. Much as Rabi'a the Teacher might have stated about *ta'dib*, Musonius described *askesis* as "a mental and moral discipline, a matter of knowledge and ethics that consists in training the mind to discern true good from true evil and to act accordingly."[151]

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[145] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 8, 72

[146] Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-Farid*, vol. 2, 438

[147] Ibid, 415

[148] Geary, *The World in a Phrase*, 52-5

[149] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 83

[150] James A. Francis, *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 11

[151] Ibid, 13

In *Hilyat al-awliya'* Shaqiq al-Balkhi states, "Befriend people the same way that you befriend fire. Take what benefits you from them, but beware lest you get burned by them."[152] Diogenes the Cynic could have made the same comment. In Sulami's *Book of Sufi Women* Rabi'a says, "I ask God's forgiveness for my lack of truthfulness in saying, 'I ask God's forgiveness.'"[153] The Stoic philosopher Epictetus (d. ca. 135 CE) could have said the same thing.[154] Many other examples can be found to suggest that the aphoristic style of early Muslim sages such as Rabi'a and Shaqiq was the product of a pedagogical culture that shared much in common with that of their Greek and Roman predecessors. This has long been known to be the case for late antique Christianity and Judaism, so why should it not be the case for early Islam as well? The similarities between the pedagogical methods of *askesis* and *ta'dib* provide an important bridge between the cultures of antiquity and early Islam. In historiographical terms, this hypothesis supports Garth Fowden's contention that the end of late antiquity should not be equated with the coming of Islam. Instead, late antiquity should be seen to last at least through the early Abbasid period of Islamic history. As Fowden states, "Although Islam brought new wine, the universality of Muhammad's message ensured that this fresh vintage could be poured even into wineskins as old as Jerusalem, and rejuvenate them."[155] As far as *ta'dib* and *askesis* are concerned, one need only replace the "Jerusalem wineskins" of Fowden's metaphor with other "wineskins" from the philosophical centers of Gondeshapur in Iraq or Alexandria in Egypt.

Fowden's approach to the historiography of late antiquity has important implications for the history of Sufism and its relationship to pre-Islamic civilizations. Rather than seeing Sufism as unique to Islam, or sharing elements with only the monotheistic religious traditions, his approach opens the door to new comparisons between the traditions of early Sufism and the practices of Classical philosophies such as Stoicism and Platonism. However, just because some pagan philosophers or Hellenized Christians practiced a type of spiritual training that was similar to the *ta'dib* of early Muslim sages like Rabi'a, this does not necessarily mean that early Muslims copied pagan or Christian models of spirituality as Margaret Smith and others have supposed.[156] Such similarities do not prove that early Muslims founded their practices of character formation on exactly the same principles as their late antique predecessors. However, the parallels between

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[152] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 8, 73

[153] See Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 78. The earliest example of this statement is by the Sufi theorist Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 990 CE). See Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ishaq al-Bukhari al-Kalabadhi, *Kitab al-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf*, ed. A. J. Arberry (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1994 [reprint of 1933 first edition]), 64.

[154] Epictetus is famous for the saying, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." See Geary, *The World in a Phrase*, 62-5.

[155] Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 143; Fowden dates the end of late antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages to the beginning of the tenth century CE, when the Abbasid Empire started to decline and a commonwealth of independent states and independent interpretations of Islam put an end to the political ideal of Islamic universalism.

[156] "It was inevitable that Christianity should have its effect upon the religious development of Islam, and Christian elements were to be found even in the time of Muhammad, and in the Qur'an itself, as well as in the Traditions, and in the rules for religious observances accepted by the orthodox as having the authority, or being in accordance with the precepts, of the founder of their faith." Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing Company, n. d. [reprint of 1931 first edition]), 125

certain late antique and early Muslim practices are striking and should be taken seriously. In light of these developments, it is important to ask the following questions: If the Umayyad and early Abbasid concept of *ta'dib* is equivalent to the Hellenistic notion of *askesis*, how might this affect our thinking about the ascetic tradition of Islam? How might Fowden's attempt to extend the world of late antiquity into the Abbasid period affect our understanding of Rabi'a the Ascetic? These questions will be explored in the next chapter.

"I am ashamed to ask for the world from the one who owns the world. So how can I ask for the world from one who does not own it?"
— Rabi'a in Jahiz, *al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin* and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, *Balaghat al-Nisa'*

Rabi'a was asked, "Have you ever performed any work (*'amal*) that you knew would be accepted by God?" She replied, "If there were anything, it would be my fear that my works would be held against me."
— Rabi'a in Jahiz, *al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin*

For most Muslims today, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is a lover of God. In the Sufi tradition, she is famous as the founder of Islamic Love mysticism. However, as we have seen in the last chapter, the Rabi'a of the earliest narratives is not the same as the Rabi'a of later narratives. We shall see in Chapter 3 how the trope of Rabi'a the Lover developed from a single quote by Muhasibi into a theology of Love. Eventually, it stood for a romantic legend that had little to do with the historical Rabi'a. In fact, the trope of Rabi'a the Lover does not become important in the Rabi'a narratives until 200 years after her death. As we shall see in Chapter 3, this was due to the Sufi theorist Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 996 CE) who made Rabi'a the Lover a central figure in his doctrinal work *Qut al-qulub* (The Sustenance of Hearts). By contrast, for Jahiz, Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, and early prosopographers such as Burjulani, Rabi'a was an ascetic. Jahiz describes her in *Kitab al-hayawan* as one of the "ascetic ritualists and renunciants among the Sunni women of asceticism and leadership." In *al-Bayan wa-l-tabyin*, he calls her one of "the ascetic ritualists and renunciants among the People of *Bayan*." At this early stage in the development of her story, the sources have much to say about Rabi'a the Teacher and Rabi'a the Ascetic but they are mostly silent about the trope of Rabi'a the Lover.

I.   CONCEPTUALIZING ASCETICISM IN EARLY ISLAM

   a.   *The World/Nonworld Dichotomy*

Margaret Smith, the most important writer on Rabi'a in the English language, characterizes her as "an ascetic of extreme other-worldliness."[1] Early accounts about Rabi'a also agree that she focused more on the world to come than on the here-and-now. The ascetic worldview is based on what anthropologist Jacques Maquet has termed the "World/Nonworld Dichotomy." For Maquet, the World/Nonworld Dichotomy is a cultural universal that is at once conceptual, behavioral, and institutional.[2] The "world" in this dichotomy refers to the social and economic networks along which human society is organized. It also refers to a set of values that

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[1] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Rainbow Bridge), 82 and (Oneworld), 105
[2] Jacques Maquet, "The World/Nonworld Dichotomy," in *The Realm of the Extra-Human, Volume 2 Ideas and Actions*, Agehananda Bharati, ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 56

are considered worldly. Comparing discussions of asceticism in Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist texts, Maquet notes that worldly values are the same regardless of the culture in which they appear: "pleasure and wealth, prestige and power."[3] The "Nonworld," by contrast, is an alternate worldview that liberates the ascetic from economic and social constraints and from the pursuit of worldly values.[4] Maquet's model of the World/Nonworld Dichotomy applies very well to asceticism in early Islam. As we shall see below, the concept of asceticism as both a form of mastery over worldly life and a path of personal liberation was important for Rabi'a and other Muslim ascetics. As Rabi'a says to Sufyan al-Thawri in Sulami's Book of Sufi Women, "Liberation from the world is to abandon all that is in it (*al-salama min al-dunya tarku ma fiha*)."[5] Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 778 or 790 CE), a famous contemporary of Rabi'a stated, "There are three types of asceticism: asceticism as an obligation (*fard*), asceticism as a virtue (*fadl*), and asceticism as liberation (*salama*)."[6]

Although Maquet did not include Islam in his essay on the World/Nonworld Dichotomy, this worldview has long been present in Islam, where it is expressed by the dichotomy of *al-dunya* (the World) versus *al-akhira* (the Afterlife or Nonworld).[7] This dichotomy is based on a fundamental opposition of values, just as Maquet found it to be for Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The following verses of the Qur'an reflect this opposition of values and exemplify the World/Nonworld Dichotomy in Islam:

> Alluring to human beings is the love of worldly desires for women, children, weight upon weight of gold and silver, for branded horses, cattle, and tillable land. These are the pleasures of the life of *al-dunya*, but the most beautiful of all goals is with God. (Qur'an, 3:14)

> Oh you who believe! What is the matter with you that when you are called to go forth in the Way of God, you cling heavily to the world (*al-ard*)? Do you prefer the life of *al-dunya* to that of *al-akhira*? The pleasure of the life of *al-dunya* is but a paltry thing when compared with the life of *al-akhira*. (Qur'an, 9:38)

> The life of *al-dunya* compared to *al-akhira* is nothing but a fleeting pleasure. (Qur'an, 13:26)

> What is this life of *al-dunya* but an amusement and a game? Verily, the house of *al-akhira* is the true means of livelihood, if only they knew. (Qur'an, 29:64)

> Nay, but you love this fleeting existence (*al-'ajila*) and avoid *al-akhira*. (Qur'an, 75: 20-21)

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[3] Ibid, 57

[4] Ibid, 58

[5] See Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 76-7. In my edition of this work, I originally translated *salama* as "safety." I now believe that "liberation" from the world is a more meaningful translation of this term.

[6] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 8, 26

[7] The Andalusian traveler and geographer Ibn Jubayr (ca. 1185 CE) called Muslim ascetics *rijal al-akhira* ("Men of the Afterlife"). See Josef Dreher, "Étude sur l'Origine et le Sens du Mot *'Uzla* dans la Littérature ascétique et mystique," *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'Études orientales du Caire (MIDEO)*, number 23, 1997, 199-200.

As these verses indicate, Muslim ascetics did not have to go beyond the literal meaning of the Qur'an to find support for their renunciation of the World. The Qur'an is full of verses warning against the World and prescribing renunciation of it. Real life is the life to come, whereas the World is but a fleeting pastime. God has charged His Messengers with the mission of informing humanity of the mercurial nature and false pleasures of the World. God's message, as portrayed in the Qur'an, warns believers to avoid the World's temptations and cautions against the assimilation of worldly values. The Muslims who took the concept of the World/Nonworld Dichotomy most to heart were those whom Marshall Hodgson called the "Piety-Minded": worshippers, ascetics, and traditionists, "for whom Islamic piety took precedence over any other interest."[8] As Hadith transmitters, jurists, and theologians, the Piety-Minded sought to maintain public conformity to key beliefs, standard rituals, and elementary morality, and protected the integrity of Islam from outside influences.[9] However, as ascetics the Piety-Minded also went further by making the Nonworld a true vocation. By interiorizing scripture and tradition, they attempted to develop a new Islamic identity, an ascetic self that replaced the World with the Nonworld according to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad.[10] Whoever the real person was behind the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic, she surely inhabited this Nonworld dimension and advocated its values.

However, merely to say that the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic has to do with the Nonworld is not enough to describe the asceticism that the "real" Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya may have practiced. Detaching oneself from the World and attempting to inhabit the Nonworld is a complex process that requires a variety of attitudes and forms of behavior. In the early Islamic period, each stage of this process was conceptualized differently and was designated by a specific term that expressed a particular approach toward the construction of an ascetic identity. For this reason, before discussing the asceticism that Rabi'a may have practiced in detail, it is first necessary to examine the key terms of early Islamic asceticism in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of the concepts that lay behind the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic. However, until now there has not been a systematic study of asceticism in Islam, as has been attempted for early Christianity. Therefore, before discussing the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic, it is necessary to map the conceptual terrain of asceticism in early Islam.

In the section that follows, I will attempt to draw the preliminary outlines of such a map, by identifying the most important ascetic practices in Rabi'a's time. Only after this task is completed will it be possible to assess the ascetic practices that Rabi'a herself may have followed. As we shall see below, saying that someone was an ascetic in Rabi'a's time meant more than just one thing. For example, the *zahid* concentrated on the practice of renunciation in general. The *wari'* took special precautions to avoid ethical failings. The *nasik* used a ritualized approach to asceticism to attain specific goals. These types of ascetic also lived in a state of *faqr*, poverty, as a general condition of their lives and practices. The concept of Rabi'a the Ascetic included all of these notions and more.

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[8] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, 250; see also the discussion of the Piety-Minded in Chapter 1 above.

[9] Ibid, 251

[10] This perspective agrees with that of Gavin Flood, who considers the ascetic self "formed by tradition and internalizes tradition and its goals." See Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

b.   The Problem of Asceticism as a Theoretical Category

The terms "ascetic" and "asceticism" come from the Greek word *askesis*, which literally means, "training," as in the training of an athlete. In the Classical traditions in which this term appears, asceticism comprises both a philosophy of life and a culture of practices that are "ascetic." We saw at the end of Chapter 1 that the concept of *askesis* among Greek and Roman Stoics was less a reactionary mode of renunciation than a regime of character formation that sought to instill the virtues of moderation, temperance, self-control, and detachment from worldly affairs. In this regard, *askesis* was similar to the early Islamic concept of *ta'dib*, which also meant character formation. As we saw in the previous chapter, in Rabi'a's time, the Arabic terms *hilm* and *muruwwa* stood for the virtues of patience, self-control, and detachment from worldly affairs that *ta'dib* was meant to develop. The *ta'dib* associated with the trope of Rabi'a the Teacher was a set of practices that trained the student for ethical and spiritual maturity. Because *ta'dib* and *askesis* resulted in the formation of similar values, I suggested that early Islam continued the culture of ethical training that it inherited from late antiquity.

Another issue that linked Rabi'a and her contemporaries to the worldviews of antiquity and late antiquity was the idea that an ethical philosophy was not just a set of teachings but a way of life, a concept stressed by the French historian of philosophy, Pierre Hadot. Classical philosophers used the Greek term *bios* ("life") for this concept, whereas early Christians used the Greek term *hodos* ("way" or "path").[11] The notion of a spiritual path as a way of life provides a bridge, not only between Rabi'a and her non-Muslim predecessors, but also between Rabi'a and the Sufis who wrote about her in later generations. The fact that the ascetics of early Islam saw themselves as following a path of training for the spiritual life was a major reason why systematizers of Sufism such as Sulami and Isfahani considered them "Sufis," even if most early Muslim ascetics did not use this term themselves. Furthermore, because this path was based on moral and spiritual development rather than on mysticism, it was also respected by those who were opposed to Sufism, such as the Hanbali scholar Ibn al-Jawzi. Despite the centrality of mystical doctrines in Sufism, the development of moral character has always been important to the Sufi Way. The Sufi systematizers of the tenth and eleventh centuries CE saw piety and ethics as the core values of Sufism and considered them the most important link between Sufism and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad. [12] This is why I concluded at the end of Chapter 1 that the discipline of *ta'dib* associated with the trope of Rabi'a the Teacher amounted to "the *Tariqa* (the Sufi Way) before the Sufi *tariqa*."

The culture of asceticism and personal training described above corresponds closely to Pierre Hadot's notion of philosophy as a way of life. Unfortunately, this notion has not been accepted universally by the academic discipline of philosophy and remains mostly unknown in the field of Islamic Studies. In general, the lack of an adequate theoretical framework for

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[11] Gail P. Corrington-Streete, "Trajectories of Ascetic Behavior," in Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valentasis, eds,, *Asceticism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 119

[12] For a discussion of Sufi ethics based on the writings of Sulami, see Kenneth Lee Honerkamp, "Sufi Foundations of the Ethics of Social Life in Islam," in Vincent J. Cornell General Editor and Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore ed., *Voices of Islam, Volume Three, Voices of Life: Family, Home, and Society* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 181-96.

comparison has held back the study of asceticism in Islam. Even outside the study of Islam, asceticism is seldom viewed as a philosophy; instead, it is seen as a (usually extreme) set of ritual practices within a religion. It has only recently become an object of comparative study in the field of Religious Studies and its main concepts are still not sufficiently understood. Before the publication of the edited volume *Asceticism* in 1998 by Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valentasis, the only other treatment of the subject that was comparative across all major religions was the survey of asceticism by James Hastings in the 1909 edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.[13] In her book *Reading Renunciation*, Elizabeth A. Clark notes that despite numerous meetings throughout the 1980s, the Society of Biblical Literature Group on Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity could never reach a consensus on the definition of asceticism. She reports, "Group members disagreed as to whether they should stress deprivation, pain, and the 'shrinking of the self' as definitive components of asceticism— or, conversely, the liberation of true 'human nature.'"[14] Participants in this group finally settled on a definition of ascetic behavior rather than of asceticism per se, retreating, as Clark says, from the "thing-in-itself" to the safety of observable practices.

However, this retreat into the notion of practice has not solved the conceptual problem of asceticism. The most concise summary of the Group on Ascetic Behavior's conclusions is Walter O. Kaelber's definition of asceticism in the current edition of *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. "[Asceticism is] a voluntary, sustained, and at least partially systematic program of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensual or profane gratifications are renouced in order to attain a higher spiritual state or a more thorough absorption in the sacred."[15] This definition, which fits the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic fairly well, views asceticism as a religious act and differentiates asceticism from other forms of disciplined training, such as athleticism or body-building.[16]

In partial opposition to this definition is the model proposed by Geoffrey Galt Harpham, who views the "ascetic imperative" as a universal human trait. Harpham compares the ascetic imperative to a computer operating system whose purpose is to form an autonomous self within a particular cultural context: "[Asceticism is] a kind of MS-DOS of cultures, a fundamental operating ground on which the particular culture, the word processing program itself, is overlaid. Where there is culture there is asceticism."[17] It is unclear whether Harpham means by this metaphor that certain cultures are more ascetic than others or whether asceticism is everywhere. Whichever the case, however, his model of asceticism is of little help in understanding the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic. With Harpham, one cannot help but feel that theory has become an end in itself and that his theorizing about asceticism has taken the concept far from how it was

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[13] Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valentasis, "Introduction," in idem, *Asceticism*, xxii

[14] Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 14

[15] Walter O. Kaelber, "Asceticism," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York and London: Macmillan & Co., 1987), vol. 1, 441, cited in Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 15

[16] See, for example, the section titled "Athletes Are Not Ascetics," in Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 216-18.

[17] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), xi

understood by its premodern practitioners.[18] To paraphrase a point made about ritual by Catherine Bell, "Rather than impose categories of what is or is not [asceticism], it may be more useful to look at how human activities establish and manipulate their own differentiation and purposes— in the very doing of the act within the context of other ways of acting."[19]

In heeding Catherine Bell's advice, the student of early Islamic asceticism should above all be careful to avoid falling into the trap of anachronism, not only with respect to postmodern discourses but also with respect to later Sufi discussions of asceticism. Just as with Sufism in general, the Sufi concept of asceticism was not fully systematized until the beginning of the eleventh century CE. For this reason, it is best for students of asceticism in early Islam to adhere closely to the statements of early ascetics but avoid as much as possible the formulations of later theorists. The works of noted Sufi theorists such as Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 988 CE), Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 990 CE), Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021 CE), and Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1074 CE) provide a mixed blessing. On the one hand, they offer some of the earliest discussions of Sufi concepts and practices, including discussions of asceticism. On the other hand, however, their authors tended to impose their own understanding of Sufi doctrines and practices on the past. By doing so, they created the impression that the concept of asceticism never changed and that the asceticism of early ascetcs such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was little different from later expressions of asceticism. This reworking of concepts is a normal part of doctrinal formation. As Gavin Flood has observed, "Tradition is not passively received but actively reconstructed in a shared imagination and reconstituted in the present as memory."[20] However, anachronistic reconstructions of the "chains of memory" that constitute the tradition of Islamic asceticism may undermine the results of historical inquiry by bestowing a false coherence on diverse concepts and practices.[21]

For this reason, if one hopes to accurately map the conceptual boundaries of Islamic asceticism in Rabi'a's time, one must focus on the key terms by which early Muslim ascetics characterized their own ascetic practices. The four most important of these terms will be discussed below. Two of these terms, *zuhd* (renunciation) and *wara'* (ethical precaution), remained in use throughout the history of Islam and denoted acceptable ascetic practices both within and outside of Sufism. One term, *nusk* (ascetic ritualism) was a characteristic of early Islamic asceticism but fell out of favor in later periods. The fourth term, *faqr* (poverty), denoted the condition of the ascetic life, but was not regarded as a formal Sufi practice until more than a century after Rabi'a's death. Eventually, this term became so popular that it is now a metaphor for the Sufi Way itself.

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[18] By contrast, for Gavin Flood true asceticism can only be part of a religious worldview: "The residues of ascetic practice in our culture have become mere technique without the accompaniment of tradition and an articulated idea of transcendence." See Idem, *The Ascetic Self*, 1.

[19] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74; it should be noted in this regard that ascetic practices are also ritual forms of behavior. Thus, we can read Bell's comment as a warning against the philosophical, "thing-in-itself" definition of asceticism that Elizabeth A. Clark advocates. As Bell points out, definitions of religious practices that are not based on actual behaviors frequently impose concepts that are either alien or out of context.

[20] Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 8

[21] The term, "chains of memory," comes from D. Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 86-7 and cited in Flood, *The Asccetic Self*, 8.

II.   TERMS OF EARLY ISLAMIC ASCETICISM

a.   Zuhd *(Renunciation)*

Zuhd is the Arabic term most commonly defined as "asceticism." It is also the broadest and most general term for asceticism in Islam, since other terms for asceticism are often regarded as subcategories of *zuhd*. The term *zuhd* is derived from the Arabic root *z-h-d*, which means, "to shun, avoid, abandon, or abstain." The practitioner of *zuhd* is called a *zahid* ("one who avoids or abstains") or a *mutazahhid* ("one who makes himself avoid or abstain"). The meaning of *zuhd* thus revolves around the idea of renunciation, whether it is active renunciation through avoidance or passive renunciation through abstention. In short, the *zahid* is a renunciant, who rejects the World, avoids it, abstains from it, or holds it in little regard. This understanding of *zuhd* is supported by the Qur'an, where in *Surat Yusuf* (Qur'an, 12:20) the Prophet Joseph's brothers sell him as a slave for a paltry price, thus demonstrating how little they value him (*wa kanu fihi min al-zahidin*, "They held him in little regard").

As a religious concept, *zuhd* reflects the values of the World/Nonworld Dichotomy discussed above. As a ritualized separation from worldly life, *zuhd* is, to quote Jonathan Z. Smith, "an assertion of difference above all else."[22] In other words, the life and worldview of the *zahid* are fundamentally different from those of the ordinary person. A common synonym for *zahid* in premodern Islam was *munqati'*, "one who is cut off [from the World]." Often, the renunciant who cut herself off from the World also practiced *'uzla*, physical withdrawal or separation from the World and its affairs. This is not quietism, but an active and self-empowered form of renunciation.[23] A contemporary of Rabi'a, 'Abdallah ibn Mubarak (d. 797 CE), devotes several chapters of his book, *Kitab al-zuhd wa al-raqa'iq* (The Book of Renunciation and the Refinements of Worship), to a discussion of the concept of asceticism in terms of the World/Nonworld Dichotomy. The ascetic doctrines covered in this work include the renunciation of the World (*al-'ard min al-dunya*), making little of the World (*al-taqallul min al-dunya*), disrespect for the World (*hawan al-dunya*), and the condemnation of the pleasures of the World (*dhamm al-tana'um fi-l-dunya*).[24] All of these concepts are covered by the term *zuhd*. In the words of the proto-Sufi Fudayl Ibn 'Iyad, "If evil were a house, the key to it would be desire for the World. If good were a house, the key to it would be renunciation of the World (*al-zuhd fi-l-dunya*)."[25]

Numerous statements of early Muslim ascetics relate *zuhd* to the theological concept of *al-thiqa bi-llah* (also called *tawakkul*), complete trust in divine providence. Margaret Smith's description of the practitioner of *tawakkul* (*al-mutawakkil 'ala Allah*) as the "true dependent" that

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[22] See Ibid 102; see also, Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 109.

[23] The comparative study of asceticism has conclusively demonstrated that whatever else it may be, asceticism is without doubt an active form of self-discipline. Thus, Margaret Smith's contention that early Sufism "consisted of asceticism carried to the point of quietism" is both conceptually wrong and historically inaccurate. See Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 100 and (Rainbow Bridge), 76.

[24] Ibn Mubarak, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 15-21, 175-7, 177-94, 262-81

[25] Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*, ed. Nur al-Din Shurayba (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1986), 13

"knows that his Lord's provision for him is better than his own for himself" is a useful way to conceive of this concept.[26] Fudayl ibn 'Iyad said, "The root of *zuhd* is satisfaction with whatever comes from God."[27] The relationship between the concepts of providence and destiny as reflected in this statement were understood by ascetics throughout the Mediterranean region and even in Central Asia. Rabi'a's contemporary Shaqiq al-Balkhi attributes his practice of *tawakkul* to a lesson about destiny that he learned from a Tibetan Buddhist monk. Shaqiq states that in his youth he was a merchant among the Turks in what is now Afghanistan. On one of his trading journeys, he came across a group he called "The Specialists" (*al-khususiyya*), who were distinguished by their beardless faces, shaved heads, and red robes. This description fits the Buddhist monks of Tibet, who in the eighth century CE were consolidating their power over Tibetan society.[28] The highest rank of Tibetan society was occupied by monks who specialized in study and meditation. After Shaqiq mocked their idolatry, one of the monks said to him, "You traveled all the way out here to seek your provision. Do you not know that the source of your provision out here is the same as your provision back there? So relax and let go of your worries."[29] Struck by this admonition, Shaqiq returned home to Balkh and became, in the words of the Sufi prosopographer Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani, "the quintessential renunciant" (*al-zahid al-haqiqi*). Shaqiq's path of asceticism recalled the Buddhist model in its emphasis on mendicant wandering, the abandonment of financial means of support, and complete trust in divine providence.[30] He stated, "No one is able to practice *zuhd* without trust in God (*illa bi-l-thiqa bi-llah*)."[31]

Many statements about *zuhd* in early Islamic literature support the contention of Vincent Wimbush and Richard Valantasis that the root of asceticism is ethical formation, which is achieved through a regime of personal development.[32] This links the concept of *zuhd* to the early Islamic concept of *ta'dib*, since the practice of *zuhd* was part of a wider regime of moral training. In this sense, the trope of Rabi'a the Teacher might be said to require the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic. This realization highlights an important point that is often overlooked by critics of asceticism, whether they are secularists, Protestant Christians, or Muslim modernists: ethical self-discipline cannot be achieved without the practices of renunciation and withdrawal. All self-discipline requires withdrawal in some sense. This might be in the form of a physical separation from worldly life, or it might be in the form of avoidance of what is harmful to the body or the spirit. In this sense, all cultures advocate asceticism to some degree. This is the truism on which

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[26] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Rainbow Bridge), 80 and (Oneworld), 104

[27] Sulami, *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*, 10

[28] Robert A. F. Thurman, "Tibetan Buddhist Perspectives on Asceticism," in Wimbush and Valentasis, *Asceticism*, 113-17

[29] Isfahani, *Hilya'*, vol. 8, 59; the Buddhist monk in this story is probably referring to the concept of *karma*, which Shaqiq most likely understood to refer to destiny (Ar. *qada'* and *qadar*).

[30] Ibid, 58; It would depart from the focus of this study to go into a detailed discussion of the possible links between Buddhist practices and those of early Sufis in Afghanistan and Central Asia. However, it is important to point out that the story of Shaqiq al-Balkhi and the Buddhist monk does not in itself prove a Buddhist influence on early Sufism. Instead, it just as easily confirms Jacques Maquet's contention that the World/Nonworld Dichotomy is a cultural universal. Shaqiq was able to learn from Buddhist monks because the notion of the World/Nonworld dichotomy was similar in both Buddhism and Islam.

[31] Abu al-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim ibn Hawazin al-Qushayri, *al-Risala al-Qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf*, eds. Ma'ruf Zurayq and 'Ali 'Abd al-Hamid Baltarji (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1990), 117

[32] Wimbush and Valentasis, "Introduction" in idem, *Asceticism*, xxix

advocates of universal asceticism such as Geoffrey Galt Harpham base their arguments. One of the lessons conveyed by Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was that even within the anti-monastic ethic of Protestantism, a strong sense of asceticism continued to govern the Protestant worldview.[33]

An anti-monastic attitude can also be found in Islam, where the Qur'an states that the Christians invented monasticism (*rahbaniyya*) for themselves despite the fact that God did not prescribe it for them (Qur'an, 57:27). The verb used in this Qur'anic verse to describe the Christian invention of monasticism is *ibtada'a*, which comes from the same root as *bid'a*, the term used in Islam to characterize the unauthorized innovation of religious practices or doctrines.[34] It is common today for Muslim reformists to say that *zuhd* is an unauthorized innovation in Islam since, like monasticism, it is not enjoined on believers in the Qur'an. However, premodern commentators on Qur'an and Hadith largely agreed that the prohibition of monasticism applied to celibacy but it did not apply to asceticism in general.[35] Furthermore, Qur'an 57:27 and the verse that follows it make it clear that despite the Qur'anic criticism of monasticism, believers are still expected to maintain some of the most important religious attitudes associated with asceticism. These include the awareness of God's presence (*taqwa*) and observance of the rights due to God (*haqq al-ri'aya*) (Qur'an, 57:28). For early Muslim ascetics such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, observance of the rights of God was fundamental both to their ethical outlook and to their practice of renunciation. This is the basis of Rabi'a's famous statement: "I am ashamed to ask for the world from the One who owns the world. So how can I ask for the world from one who does not own it?"

b. Wara' *(Ethical Precaution)*

The pious caution expressed in the above statement is an example of *wara'*, a concept that stood for the ethical aspect of asceticism in early Islam. According to Jahiz, Rabi'a was a noteworthy exemplar of *wara'* and subsequent writers continued to affirm this claim.[36] The term *wara'* comes from the Arabic root *w-r-'*, which means "to pause, to hesitate, to be cautious, to refrain, to abstain." Thus, the concept of *wara'* adds the notions of precaution and avoidance to the concept of *zuhd* as ascetic renunciation. Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d. 830 CE), who founded an early school of Sufism in Syria but lived in Basra while Rabi'a was alive, regarded *wara'* as

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[33] See Chapter 4, "The Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism" in Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons with Introduction by Anthony Giddens (London and New York: Routledge & Co., 1996 [reprint of 1930 first edition]), 95-154.

[34] See Umar F. Abd-Allah, "Creativity, Innovation, and Heresy in Islam," in *Voices of Islam, Volume Five: Voices of Change*, Vincent J. Cornell General Editor, Omid Safi Volume Editor (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 1-22.

[35] Ibid; this was the opinion, for example, of the Hadith transmitter Abu Dawud al-Sijistani (d. 888-89 CE), the compiler of *Sunan Abi Dawud*.

[36] See, for example, Jahiz, *al-Hayawan*, vol. 1, 170. Margaret Smith does not discuss the important concept of *wara'* in her treatment of Rabi'a's asceticism in *Rabi'a the Mystic*. This is a curious omission, both because of the importance of this practice and because it is mentioned by Jahiz, one of the earliest writers on Rabi'a. One wonders whether Smith omitted *wara'* because it did not lend itself to easy comparison with Christian asceticism.

fundamental to the practice of asceticism (*al-wara' awwal al-zuhd*).[37] As an early Islamic ascetic practice, *wara'* was most often expressed as a ritualized form of avoidance: specifically, the avoidance of substances, actions, or possessions that had the potential of being ethically polluting. The *wari'*, literally "the abstemious person," often went to great lengths to avoid contact with anything that was ethically questionable.[38]

As an asceticism based on the ritualized avoidance of pollution, *wara'* was often enacted through the body. It was through this form of ascetic practice that the concepts of purity and impurity intersected with the concepts of the sacred and the profane. In the culture of *wara'* the notions of ritual purity and ethical purity were seen as interrelated. For early Muslim ascetics, the practice of *wara'* marked the believer's commitment to the pure world of the sacred and the abandonment of the impure world of the profane. The Iranian Sufi 'Ali al-Hujwiri (d. 1071 CE) described this commitment as a "double purification" because ethical awareness combined "the tongue's observance with the heart's belief."[39] Reflecting both the ethical values of *wara'* and the concern of early ascetics for ritual observances, Abu Bakr al-Shibli (d. 945 CE) stated, "Whenever I neglect any rule of purification, some vain conceit always arises in my heart."[40]

Sufi women were particularly likely to regard the practice of *wara'* as an act of pollution avoidance. The *wara'* of Sufi women was based on the belief that the body of the ascetic was a vessel for the divine presence. This attitude was also shared by early Christians. According to Peter Brown, in early Christianity it was based on the notion of the body as a microenvironment. "It was a vehicle through which the spirit adjusted to its present material environment as a whole."[41] In this microenvironment, body and soul were in a state of delicate balance. Upsetting the body could upset the soul and vice-versa. Muslim practitioners of *wara'* had a similar view of body and soul. A major danger for the soul, especially for women, was the defilement of the soul's inner purity through the body's contact with the World. Thus, the practice of *wara'* among Sufi women included rituals of avoidance that were designed to protect the soul from sources of ethical pollution that came from the outside. As a subtle yet dramatic response to the challenges of the World, the practice of *wara'* by Sufi women can be seen as a form of "dramatic play" that inscribed the ethical boundaries of the World/Nonworld Dichotomy on the ascetic body.[42]

Although the Islamic view of the ascetic body was similar in some ways to the Christian view of the body as a temple for the Holy Spirit, the Islamic concept of *wara'* actually had more in common with late antique philosophical notions of purification by means of avoidance (Gr.

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[37] Qushayri, *al-Risala*, 110

[38] The Lutheran Bishop and Orientalist scholar Tor Andrae saw *wara'* as an expression of religious anxiety rather than of precaution. For this reason, he translated the term *al-wari'un* as "anxiously pious ones." According to Andrae's own account, this interpretation was a consequence of his personal experiences with "Old Pietist" Lutheran traditionalists in Sweden, whose acts of "pious anxiety" reminded him of early Sufis. See Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, 40-41.

[39] 'Ali B. 'Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub, the Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufiism*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Luzac and Company Ltd., 1976 [reprint of 1911 first edition]), 292

[40] Ibid, 293

[41] Brown uses the term, "microclimate" rather than microenvironment. See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 170-71.

[42] On asceticism as a form of "dramatic play," see Corrington-Streete, "Trajectories of Ascetic Behavior," 119.

hagneia) than with Christian attitudes.[43] Peter Brown describes *hagneia* as "a visceral reflex of avoidance, by which the pious strove to preserve charged boundaries between their bodies and all forms of polluting, anomalous mixture."[44] In his discussion of this concept, Brown cites as an example the Neo-Platonic philosopher Porphyry (d. 305 CE), but his description could apply just as well to the early Muslim practitioner of *wara'*. A key difference between Christian and Islamic views of purity had to do with where impurities entered the body. For early Christians, impurities were believed to enter the body through the sexual organs. By contrast, Muslim practitioners of *wara'*, along with the Neo-Platonist Porphyry, believed that impurities were more likely to enter the body through the mouth.[45] Thus, early Muslim ascetics tended to be more concerned with food pollution than with sexual pollution.

Early ascetics in Islam believed that the ascetic body could become unfit for the divine presence through neglect of worship or through contact with ritual or ethical impurities. Major sources of impurity were desire (*shahwa*) and greed (*tama'*). Desire and greed were linked to the appetites both literally and metaphorically. The mouth was seen as a source of impurity because it was through the mouth that the most basic appetite, the appetite for food, was gratified. Eating food that was ritually or ethically impure was believed to pollute the body inwardly, making it unfit for worship. This belief is reflected in the following statement by one of Rabi'a's most famous predecessors among the women ascetics of Basra. Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya, the founder of the Basra school of women's asceticism, admonishes her student Umm al-Aswad not to spoil the pure breast-feeding she had given her as a child by taking forbidden substances into her mouth. She scolds, "Do not spoil the breast-feeding I have given you by eating forbidden food (*akl al-haram*), for when I was nursing you I made every effort to eat only what was lawful (*akl al-halal*). So make every effort after this to eat only what is lawful. Perhaps you will succeed in your service to your Lord and in your acceptance of His will." Upon recounting this story, Umm al-Aswad said, "I would not eat anything suspicious lest it cause me to miss either a prescribed prayer or an extra invocation."[46]

To use a concept developed by Catherine Bell, the *wara'* of Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya and other early Muslim ascetics "ritualized" the Islamic legal distinction of lawful versus unlawful (*halal* vs. *haram*) in terms of the World/Nonworld Dichotomy. The unlawful or impure binds the soul to the World, whereas the lawful or ethically pure releases the soul to seek its home in the Nonworld. Bell's concept of ritualization allows the student of Islamic asceticism to contrast *wara'* with renunciation by defining *wara'* as the ritualization of ascetic renunciation in ethical terms.[47] As the ritualization of ethical difference, *wara'* drew a distinction between actions and substances that were lawful, pure, and sacred and those that were unlawful, impure, or profane. In the asceticism of avoidance that characterized *wara'*, the legally forbidden was regarded as

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[43] In early Christianity, the term *hagneia* denoted celibacy. In early Islam, celibacy as a sign of purity was more important for women than for men. See Giulia Sfameni Gasparo, "Asceticism and Anthropology: *Enkrateia* and 'Double Creation' in Early Christianity," in Wimbush and Valentasis, *Asceticism*, 127.

[44] Brown, *The Body and Society*, 182

[45] The Sufi Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896 CE) said, "When one eats that which is forbidden, the members of his body become disobedient, whether he wants it so or not. But when one eats only permitted food, his members become obedient and disposed to do good." Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, 38

[46] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 166

[47] On the concept of ritualization, see Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 88-93.

unclean and hence was untouchable as a source of pollution. Contact with the unclean was believed to rub off on the person who was exposed to it in the way that a disease could be transferred from one person to another. This meant that for the Muslim ascetic who was committed to both inward and outward purity, even things of doubtful origin (*shubuhat*) had to be avoided, lest they make the ascetic impure in both body and spirit. For the practitioner of *wara'*, what was unlawful or ethically impure was more than just polluting; it was also toxic for the development of a spiritual way of life.

In stories about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, the clearest illustration of how an ethically polluting substance affects both inward and outward purity is in Farid al-Din al-'Attar's (d. 1220 CE) *Ilahi Nama* (Divine Book or Book of Theology). In this story, al-Hasan al-Basri comes to visit Rabi'a in the wilderness. He finds her surrounded by mountain goats, gazelles, and other animals. But when the animals see Hasan, they immediately take fright and run away. When Hasan asks Rabi'a why the animals are afraid of him but not of her, she asks what he has had to eat. "Onions fried in animal fat," he replies. "You have eaten the fat of these poor creatures," she says, "so how could they not run away from you?" Then Rabi'a proceeds to admonish Hasan and tells him that if he ate just a little like an ant— perhaps one date each day— his body would be safe from the worms of the grave. She says: "Nothing are you, oh man, without the latrine and the kitchen. Has your heart not been taken away by these two hells? From one hell to another you go; from the latrine to the kitchen you go . . . You were told to purify your soul, but you are always filling your body. You must always respect the inner (*batin*), yet you only serve the outer (*zahir*)."[48]

Major sources of ethical pollution in premodern Islamic society were Bedouins and the state. Trade with Bedouins was suspect because Bedouins often obtained their goods by raiding and stealing from others. If the food given to an ascetic came from a Bedouin, it might have been obtained illegally. The same concern applied to governmental officials and to the state in general. Governments were often seen as sources of extortion and oppression and governmental officials were constantly looking for new sources of revenue. It was widely felt that the state was unjust by nature and that ethical persons should avoid governmental service. Consequently, Muslim hagiographical collections are full of stories about noted religious figures that refuse to serve in legal or administrative positions when called upon to do so. Here, the practice of *wara'* reveals a potential for political dissidence. However, one should be careful before concluding that every practitioner of *wara'* was a dissident. In most cases, complaints about the lack of governmental ethics in Muslim hagiographical narratives are generic and are not directed against specific regimes or individuals. An example of this can be seen in one of the few instances where the Sufi theorist Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri mentions Rabi'a in his *Risala*. In this account, Qushayri states that Rabi'a once tried to mend her torn garment by the light of a public lantern (*fi daw' sha'lat al-sultan*). "She lost her heart for a time until she realized why. Then she tore her garment and

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[48] Shaykh Farid al-Din 'Attar Nishapuri, *Ilahi nama*, Fu'ad Ruhani, ed. (Tehran: Intisharat Zavvar, 1961), 96-7; translation by Vincent J. Cornell. See also, John Andrew Boyle, *The Ilahi-nama or Book of God of Farid al-Din 'Attar* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), 115-16. Some modern observers see this story as proof that Rabi'a was a vegetarian. On the vegetarian web site Compassionate Spirit, a shortened and altered version of this story states that Hasan ate meat but Rabi'a ate dried bread: "The animals recognized that Rabi'a was a vegetarian and that Hasan was not." http://www.compassionatespirit.com/spiritual-trends-and-veg.htm

found her heart."[49] In this anecdote, the term, "heart," stands for moral equilibrium or spiritual balance. What caused Rabi'a to lose her equilibrium was the possibility that the money used by the government to install and maintain the public lanterns may have been obtained by unlawful means.[50]

Unlike the term *zuhd*, *wara'* does not appear in the Qur'an. However, later Sufi writers tried to portray *wara'* as in agreement with Qur'an and Sunna by tracing it back to the Prophet Muhammad and *al-Salaf al-Salih*. For example, the Sufi 'Abd al-Malik al- Kharkushi (d. 1016 CE) justifies the practice of *wara'* with the following hadith: "The excellence of knowledge is better than the excellence of worship; the excellence of your religion is *wara'*."[51] In Qushayri's *Risala*, the Prophet says, "Be a practitioner of *wara'* and you will be the most devout among people."[52] A hadith with a similar meaning is also related by Abu Bakr al-Sarraj in *Kitab al-luma'*. "What is truly yours of your religion (*malaku dinikum*) is *wara'*."[53]

According to Louis Massignon, the establishment of *wara'* as a form of Islamic religious practice was due to the influence of al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728 CE), a noted theologian and ascetic who is often depicted as Rabi'a's companion in Sufi legends.[54] Hasan's interest in *wara'* was in agreement with his ethical view of piety, which held that a life of honesty accompanied by prayer is better for salvation than prayer alone.[55] Kharkushi similarly describes Hasan's understanding of *wara'* as based on the virtues of absolute truthfulness and sincerity.[56] Later the Sufi Qushayri stated that Hasan learned from one of the Shiite Imams that the essence of religious practice is *wara'*. Hasan is so impressed with this teaching that he proclaims, "A grain's weight of pure *wara'* is better than a hundred-weight of fasting and prayer."[57]

One of the most important exponents of *wara'* in the generation after Rabi'a was al-Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 857 CE). Muhasibi, who was born and raised in Basra but later moved to Baghdad, seems to have been in many respects Rabi'a's doctrinal successor. As we saw in Chapter 1, his citation of a statement on love by Rabi'a is the earliest reference to Rabi'a in any

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[49] Qushayri, *al-Risala*, 114

[50] Other accounts attribute this story to Mukhkha (Marrow or Essence), the sister of the early Sufi Bishr al-Hafi (The Barefoot) of Baghdad (d. 840 CE). These accounts claim that Mukhkha supported herself by spinning wool, and that she would continue spinning by the light of the moon even after the lamps of Baghdad had gone out. The earliest example of this story that I am aware of can be found in the chapter on *wara'* in 'Abd al-Malik ibn Muhammad al-Kharkushi (d. 1016 CE), *Tahdhib al-Asrar*, Bassam Muhammad Barud ed. (Abu Dhabi: al-Majma' al-Thaqafi, 1999), 108. Kharkushi's work comes from the same region as Qushayri's but predates it by nearly fifty years. Later the Hanbali scholar Ibn al-Jawzi attributed this story to Mudgha (Embryo), another sister of Bishr al-Hafi. See idem, *Sifat al-Safwa*, vol. 2, 525-6 and the Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 324. On Kharkushi's *Tahdhib al-asrar*, see Chapter 3 below and Sara Sviri, "The Early Mystical Schools of Baghdad and Nishapur or: In Search of Ibn Munazil," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 30 (2005), 451-6; Sviri calls Kharkushi "Khargushi."

[51] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-Asrar*, 108; this hadith does not appear in the six canonical collections. Its earliest mention may have been by Ahmad ibn Hanbal. See idem, *Kitab al-Zuhd*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Qasim (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1976), 108.

[52] Qushayri, *al-Risala*, 110

[53] Sarraj, *al-Luma'*, 44

[54] Massignon, *Essay*, 131

[55] Ibid, 129; see also, Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 79-81.

[56] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*, 109

[57] Qushayri, *al-Risala*, 112

extant Sufi work. Rabi'a's notion of essential asceticism, which will be discussed below and in Chapters 3 and 4, found its fullest expression in Muhasibi's concept of *muhasaba*, from which his name was derived. Muhasibi defines *muhasaba* as a "contract with the conscience" (*al-'aqd bi-l-damir*) in which the ascetic resolves to examine all actions critically before they are performed.[58] This process of critical self-examination shares much in common with the notion of *wara'* as ethical precaution. Muhasibi wrote a treatise on *wara'* titled, *Kitab al-makasib wa-l-wara' wa-l-shubha wa bayan mubahiha wa mahzuriha wa akhlaq al-nas fi-talabiha wa-l-radd 'ala al-ghalizin fi-ha* (Treatise on Earnings, Precaution, and Doubt with an Explanation of What is Permissible about Them, What is Forbidden about Them, the Ethics of Seeking Them and a Refutation of Those Who Are Excessive in Seeking Them).[59] In this work, he defines *wara'* as "the avoidance of everything that God dislikes, whether in speech or in action or in the heart or the limbs; and caution against neglecting what God has made obligatory for either the heart or the limbs."[60]

The relationship of *muhasaba* to *wara'* is that of a means to an end. For Muhasibi, *muhasaba* is the most effective technique by which the ascetic can practice *wara'* in daily life. Muhasibi's most famous work was *al-Ri'aya li-huquq Allah wa-l-qiyam biha* (The Care for and Establishment of the Rights of God). The importance of *wara'* to the ascetic life is discussed in the final chapter, "The Training of Disciples" (*ta'dib al-muridin*). Muhasibi's use of the term *ta'dib* in both *al-Ri'aya* and *al-Makasib* demonstrates that this was still the way that early Sufis conceived of spiritual training in the generation after Rabi'a's death. In *al-Makasib* Muhasibi refers to *ta'dib* as *al-ta'dib li-l-nafs*, "the training of the soul."[61] This indicates that like Rabi'a he viewed *ta'dib* as a regime of spiritual and ethical training. For Muhasibi, *wara'* is an important aspect of *ta'dib* because it fosters self-awareness and prevents moral backsliding. It is especially important in business (*tijara*) and the marketplace (*suq*). The marketplace is so full of ethical pollution that "those who seek purity in their actions" (*ahl al-safwa min al-a'mal*) are enjoined to use *wara'* as a type of moral armor whenever they enter a place where goods are sold.[62]

However, the mere avoidance of ethical impurity is not enough by itself to make ascetics immune from the World. Besides putting on the armor of *wara'*, ascetics must also conduct an active defense against ethical pollution through the remembrance and invocation of God (*dhikr*

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[58] See al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi, *Kitab al-Makasib* in *al-Masa'il fi a'mal al-qulub wa-l-jawarih wa al-Makasib wa al-'Aql*, ed. 'Abd al-Qadir Ahmad 'Ata (Cairo: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1969), 200.

[59] This work is available in two Arabic editions. The full title of the work as given above comes from a photograph of the title page of the manuscript in the University of Cairo Library. See al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi, *al-Rizq al-halal wa haqiqat al-tawakkul 'ala Allah* (Lawful Gain and the Reality of Trusting in God), Muhammad 'Uthman al-Khisht ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qur'an, 1984), 25. The editor of this work changed the original title to fit his view of the contents. A more trustworthy version can be found in a collection of three of Muhasibi's works by 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata, the premier editor of Muhasibi's writings. See *al-Masa'il fi a'mal al-qulub wa-l-jawarih wa al-Makasib wa al-'Aql*, 171-234.

[60] Muhasibi, *al-*Makasib in *al-Masa'il*, 200; for a summary of the contents of this work see also Smith, *An Early Mystic,* 50-52.

[61] Muhasibi, *al-Makasib* in *al-Masa'il*, 225

[62] See the discussion in Abu 'Abdullah al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi, *al-Ri'aya li-huquq Allah*, ed. 'Abd al-Qadir Ahmad 'Ata (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, fourth printing, n.d,); for *Kitab ta'dib al-muridin*, 503-19. The phrase, "those who seek purity in their actions" comes from idem, *al-Makasib* in *al-Masa'il*, 222.

Allah).[63] For Muhasibi, the invocation of God creates a sort of spiritual force field that shields the God-fearing person from the pollution of the World. The addition of ritual formulas of remembrance to the practice of asceticism takes asceticism out of the domain of *wara'* as ethical avoidance and into the domain of *nusk*, asceticism as a form of ritual practice.

c. Nusk *(Ascetic Ritualism)*

Nusk was the most visible form of ascetic practice in Rabi'a's time. However, this practice is often overlooked in studies of Islamic asceticism because the term *nusk* is commonly equated with *zuhd*. One of the reasons for this is that while the *nasik*, the practitioner of *nusk*, is often mentioned in early Islamic texts, one seldom finds discussions of *nusk* as a concept.[64] For example, when Jahiz describes Rabi'a as a renunciant (*mutazahhida*), he also describes her as a *nasika* but he does not say what this means. Clearly, for Jahiz, the concept of *nusk* was self-evident. Although he devotes an entire chapter of his book *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin* to the subject of *zuhd*, he gives no such attention to *nusk*.[65] Apparently, the *nasik* was such a common figure in early Islamic society that writers did not feel the need to explain what the term signified. The present-day student of early Islamic asceticism is thus faced with a dilemma. Although *nusk* was an important concept of early Islamic ascetic practice, its meaning is hidden within its historical context. It is important that this concept be clarified if we are to understand the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic.

As discussed in Chapter 1, *n-s-k*, the Arabic root of the word *nusk*, is ambiguous, and carries meanings that range from rituals of worship to ritual sacrifice, and even to reclusion.[66] The common element in all of these definitions is the concept of ritual. Most of the verses of the Qur'an that contain the root *n-s-k* deal with ritual observances. For example, one verse states: "Our Lord! Put us in a state of submission to you; make of our children a community that submits to you; show us the rites we are to perform (*wa-arina manasikana*), and redeem us (*wa tub 'alayna*)" (Qur'an, 2:128). The term *manasik* in this verse refers to Islamic rituals and sacrifices, such as the rituals of the Hajj pilgrimage and the sacrifice at Mina that is one of the concluding acts of the pilgrimage. In her study of the logic of the Qur'an, Rosalind Gwynne defines the central meaning of *n-s-k* as the ritual fulfillment of God's covenant. She draws this conclusion from the use of this root in another Qur'anic verse, "My prayer and my ritual sacrifice (*nusuki*) and my life and my death are for God, the Lord of the Worlds" (Qur'an, 6:162). This verse comes after a passage in the Qur'an (6:151-2) that describes the ritual observances (*manasik*) required by God and ends with the command to fulfill God's covenant (*wa bi-'ahdi Allahi ufu*).[67]

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[63] Muhasibi, *al-Ri'aya*, 513

[64] Early Islamic religious texts that are still extant today include works on ritual practices (*manasik*) written by Hadith specialists, such as *Kitab al-Manasik* (The Book of Ritual Practices) by Sa'id ibn Abi 'Uruba (d. 773 CE) and *Kitab al-Manasik al-Kabir* (The Big Book of Ritual Practices) by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855 CE). However, the contents of these works consist only of descriptions of ritual practices, not discussions of *nusk* as a concept.

[65] Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 3, 81-122

[66] Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an*, 15

[67] Ibid 14-15

Gwynne's definition of *nusk* as the fulfillment of covenantal responsibility provides an important link between the ascetic understanding of *nusk* in Rabi'a's time and the related term *nusuk*, meaning ritual sacrifice, that appears in the Qur'anic verse quoted above. Both *nusk* and *nusuk* involve the fulfillment of God's covenant by means of ritual acts. In fact, the correct performance of ritual is so important in Islam that it is said to comprise half of the Shari'a.[68] Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is divided into *fiqh al-mu'amalat*, which deals with social actions, and *fiqh al-'ibadat*, which deals with rituals of worship. Early legal works such as *al-Muwatta'* (The Trodden Path) by Malik ibn Anas (d. 795 CE) discuss the root *n-s-k* primarily in terms of ritual sacrifice and prescribe rituals of expiation (*fidya*, literally "ransom") for neglecting their observance.[69]

However, the meaning of this term became broader in later centuries. For example, the medieval Arabic dictionary *Lisan al-'Arab* (The Tongue of the Arabs) by Jamal al-Din ibn Manzur (d. 1321 CE) defines *nusk* as "anything that brings a person close to God." It defines the *nasik* broadly as a "worshipper of God" (*'abid*). However, when *Lisan al-'Arab* gives examples of *nusk*, most of these examples involve the observance of rituals.[70] In the most suggestive passage for the use of this term among early Muslim ascetics, Ibn Manzur says that the sincere worshipper of God is called a *nasik* because he purifies himself from the pollution of sin in the same way that gold or silver is purified by extracting the pure metal from impure alloys. Following this analogy, the *nasik* is an ascetic who purifies himself by performing ritual acts to signify his renunciation of the World.[71] Thus, when we put Ibn Manzur's definitions into modern theoretical terms, we can say that *nusk* is the ritualization of Islamic asceticism, either in terms of renunciation (*zuhd*) or ethical precaution (*wara'*), or both.

Ibn Manzur's understanding of *nusk* as a form of ritual purification is similar to that of the eleventh-century Iranian Sufi 'Ali al-Hujwiri, who as we saw above, gave great importance to the concept of ritual purity. For Hujwiri, the most important form of *nusk* was *mujahada*, which literally means "disciplined struggle." Although this term is commonly defined as "self-mortification," it would be a mistake to think of it in this way without qualification. For Hujwiri, *mujahada* as a type of *nusk* entailed any form of ritualized discipline, from rituals designed to develop the ascetic self to rituals required for the practice of Islam in general. He said, "The most important act of *mujahada* is to observe the outward rules of discipline (Pers. *adab-i zahir*) assiduously in all circumstances."[72] To illustrate this point, Hujwiri cites the example of Rabi'a's contemporary Sufyan al-Thawri, who suffered from rectal discharges during his final illness. Once, he performed sixty ablutions before a single prayer, saying, "I shall at least be clean when I leave this world."[73] Similarly, the early Sufi Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d. 874 CE) said, "Whenever

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[68] The Prophet Muhammad stated: "If there is something defective in [a believer's] prayers, the Lord (glorified and exalted be He) will say, 'See if my servant has any supererogatory prayers with which may be completed that which was defective in his obligatory prayers. Then the rest of his actions will be judged in like fashion.'" *Forty Hadith Qudsi*, translated and selected by Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (publisher's information and date not given), 26-7.

[69] See, for example, Malik ibn Anas, *Kitab al-Muwatta'*, ed. Faruq Sa'd (Beirut: Dar al-Afaq al-Jadida, 1981), 345-49.

[70] Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab*, vol. 10, 498

[71] Ibid, 499

[72] Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 292

[73] Ibid, 293

the thought of the World comes to me, I perform an act of ritual purification (*tahara*) and whenever the thought of the Afterlife comes to me, I perform a full ritual ablution (*ghusl*)."[74] For Abu Yazid, the contemplation of the Afterlife required a ritual washing because it was like a preparation for death. Just as a corpse requires a full washing to cleanse it of impurities before burial, the body of the ascetic also requires a ritual washing to prepare it for the renunciation of the World and the acceptance of God's presence.[75]

The covenantal meaning of *nusk* highlighted by Rosalind Gwynne suggests an interesting parallel with Syrian Christianity. Early Muslim ascetics were in frequent contact with Aramaic-speaking Christians and certain Muslim practitioners of *nusk* were even called "monks" (*ruhban*).[76] In the early Syrian Church, lay ascetics belonged to a group that was known in Western Aramaic as *bnay qiyama*, "children of the covenant." These men and women pledged themselves to Christ at the time of their baptism and lived distinctive lives in their communities. The key member of the *bnay qiyama* was the *ihidaya* (Syr.), the "single, solitary, or unique one." This person was "singled out" from the majority of believers by practicing celibacy, living separately from the opposite sex, and practiced the imitation of Christ through various forms of self-sacrifice.[77] The Western Aramaic term *ihidaya* is close in meaning to the Arabic term *munfarid*, which similarly denoted the "unique" or "solitary" ascetic who was singled out from the multitude because of his ascetic practices. Rabi'a the Ascetic is typically portrayed as a *munfarida*. Like the Syrian Christian *ihidaya*, she practiced celibacy, lived separately from the opposite sex, and followed a regime of ascetic disciplines.[78]

The most characteristic practice of the Syrian Christian *ihidaya* was *abila*, a Western Aramaic term that means "sorrow" or "mournful penitence."[79] In Islam, the penitent (Ar. *ta'ib*, literally, "the one who turns toward God") similarly practices repentance (*tawba*) and performs ritual acts of prayer and self-sacrifice in the hope of receiving forgiveness.[80] Redemption, the divine acceptance or favor that is the fruit of the forgiveness of sins, is depicted in the Qur'an as a bargain that depends on the notion of reciprocal "turning." In other words, God turns toward the

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[74] Ibid

[75] For a description of the cleansing ritual of the dead in Islam, see Rkia E. Cornell, "Death and Burial in Islam," *Voices of Islam Vol. 3, Voices of Life: Family, Home, and Society*, Vincent J. Cornell, General Editor and Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore, Volume Editor (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 163-67

[76] The root of the word *ruhban* (*r-h-b*) connotes fear or trepidation. Thus, the Arabic term for monk, *rahib*, literally means "God-fearing." The early Qur'an commentator Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 767 CE) stated that whenever Muslims hear the term *ruhban* they should understand it to mean, "believers who practice their religion with zeal" (*mujtahidun fi dinihim*). See Massignon, *Essay*, 98-9. Massignon also notes that the scholar of Hadith Darimi (d. 857-58 CE) was called "The *Rahib* of Kufa" (Ibid, n. 33).

[77] On the *bnay qiyama* and *ihidaya*, see Sidney H. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: the Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in Wimbush and Valentasis, *Asceticism*, 238.

[78] 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd (d. 793-94 CE), an associate of Rabi'a and founder of a hermitage for ascetics at 'Abbadan in what is now Iran, stated in verse, "The way of truth is solitary/ and those who enter the way of truth are alone and unique (*afrad*)." See Massignon, *Essay*, 148.

[79] Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria," 234-5

[80] The Greek term for repentance, *metanoia*, also means "turning" or "redirection." According to the Greek Orthodox writer John Chryssavgis, "The whole of the Christian life (is) a repentance; (the Greek word 'meta-noia') implies reorientation and redirection from death to life, from sin to grace." Cited in Hannah Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief: Tears of Contrition in the Writings of the Early Syrian and Byzantine Fathers* (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2004), 33.

worshipper to the extent that the worshipper turns toward God. "Show us the rituals (*manasik*) that we must perform and grant us redemption" (*tub 'alayna*, literally "turn for our sake,"), says the Qur'an (2:128). The use of the term *manasik* in this verse implies that ritual acts in Islam are outward signs of the "turning toward God" that must take place before redemption is granted. Later on in the same Sura, the Qur'an also states that penitence requires ritual purification: "Verily God loves the penitents (*tawwabin*) and those who make themselves pure (*mutatahhirin*)" (Qur'an, 2:232).

The Sura of Repentance (Qur'an 9, *al-Tawba*) in the Qur'an depicts the relation between repentance and redemption as a contract of sale (*bay'*) (Qur'an 9:111-12). In this Sura, certain specified categories of believers "sell" the World to God in return for the Nonworld: these are penitents (*ta'ibun*), worshippers (*'abidun*), praisers (*hamidun*), wanderers (*sa'ihun*), bowers (*raki'un*), prostrators (*sajidun*), commanders of the right and forbidders of the wrong (*al-amiruna bi-l-ma'ruf wa ql-nahuna 'an al-munkar*), and those who observe the limits set by God (*al-hafizuna li-hudud Allah*). The twelfth-century Andalusian Sufi Abu Madyan (d. 1198 CE) quotes Rabi'a as describing the penitent in a similar way: "The signs of true repentance are remorse and a heart that is fearful, pure, and submissive— one that is a dwelling place for obedience."[81]

In Rabi'a's time, the term *nasik* was used for all who made a vocation of the ritual practices mentioned in the Qur'anic passage quoted above. The penitents, the worshippers, the praisers, the wanderers, the bowers and prostrators, people whose hearts are dwelling places of obedience to God's command— all were regarded as *nussak* (plural of *nasik*). Social activists who added the requirement to command the right and forbid the wrong and by doing so, helped maintain the legal and ethical boundaries of Islamic morality were considered to be *nussak* as well. However, this latter group can also be seen as practitioners of *wara'*, the ethical aspect of Islamic asceticism. The close relationship between the concepts of *nusk* and *wara'* is one reason why it has been so difficult for contemporary scholars to discern a clear meaning for the term *nusk* in early Sufi texts. Both *nusk* and *wara'* involved the ritualization of practices associated with asceticism. However, whereas *nusk* primarily involved the ritualization of Islamic practices of worship and symbolic acts of renunciation, *wara'* involved the ritualization of social behavior. The importance of *nusk* was that it added an extra dimension of care and observance to the rites that were required for every Muslim. *Wara'* accomplished much the same for the observance of moral distinctions. Thus, *nusk* may be summarized as the ritualized outward form (*zahir*) of Islamic asceticism whereas *wara'* can be summarized as the ritualized inward form (*batin*) of Islamic asceticism.

According to Gavin Flood, "The ascetic self is constructed through ritual and entextualizes the body through ritual."[82] This statement helps us understand why the concept of asceticism in general (*zuhd*) in early Islam was conflated with *nusk*. Ritual practice was one of the most important connections in early Islam between asceticism and the scriptural traditions of religion. As Flood explains, every act of asceticism is a ritual performance, "but a performance entails a particular kind of competence or cultural knowledge that flows through the

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[81] Vincent J. Cornell, *The Way of Abu Madyan: Doctrinal and Poetic Works of Abu Madyan Shu'ayb ibn al-Husayn al-Ansari (c. 509/1115-15—594/1198)* (Cambridge, U. K.: The Islamic Texts Society, 1996), 108-9

[82] Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 214

generations."[83] In the ascetic culture of early Islam, *nusk* "entextualized" the values of the Qur'an through ritual acts of worship and self-denial. Since the actions of the *nasik* were visible for all to see, one could say that the *nasik* was the "performance artist" of Islamic asceticism.

Sometimes taking their practices to extremes, early Muslim *nussak* concentrated on the dramatic aspects of ritual performance and sought God's favor by exerting themselves beyond the minimum of the required forms of worship. The *nussak* of early Islam practiced a form of asceticism that was goal-directed and instrumental and viewed their devotions as an investment of spiritual capital. As Eliezer Diamond states about the ascetics of rabbinic Judaism, the *nussak* of Rabi'a's time saw their exertions "as an investment in a spiritual bank account, as it were, being held in one's name."[84] The slogan of the *nasik* was the famous "Hadith of Supererogatory Devotions" (*Hadith al-Nawafil*): "My slave continues to draw near to me with supererogatory devotions so that I shall love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask [something] of me, I would surely give it to him and were he to ask refuge of Me, I would surely grant it."[85] A similar notion of spiritual capital is expressed in a statement by Rabi'a to Sufyan al-Thawri: "You are but a numbered set of days. When one day goes, a part of you goes as well. And when the part is lost, the whole is sure to be lost too."[86] In other words, the ascetic self is defined by acts of devotion to God, which are limited in number. Losing days from one's devotion to God is like losing part of oneself.

One of the early accounts attributed to Rabi'a expresses a similarly instrumental ethic. This account appears in *Masari' al-'ushshaq* (Battlefields of the Lovers) by Ja'far ibn Ahmad al-Sarraj of Baghdad (d. 1106 CE). It recounts the story of a dream in which Rabi'a is chastised by a *houri* of Heaven for neglecting her nighttime prayers and night-vigils (*tahajjud* and *qiyam al-layl*). These nightly devotions are so often associated with the *nasik* in early Islamic literature that they can be regarded as typical markers of ascetic ritualism:

> Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya said: "I was struck by an illness that prevented me from doing my night vigils. So, instead, I read a section of the Qur'an during the daytime for some days, for it is stated that reading a section (*juz'*) of the Qur'an every day is equivalent to performing night vigils."

> She continued: "Then Allah Most High and Exalted, granted me my health. During the period of my sickness, I became accustomed to reading a section of the Qur'an [every day] and found solace in doing so. I stopped my night vigils, and one night during my sleep I had a vision in my dream, as if I were lifted up to a green garden (*rawda*) with palaces and beautiful vegetation. While I was walking around it and marveling in its beauty, I saw a green bird and a slave-girl (*jariyya*) chasing the bird, as if she wanted to catch it. Her beauty preoccupied me from the bird's beauty and I said to her, 'What do you want from him? Leave him alone, by God, for I have never seen a bird more beautiful than this!'

> "'Indeed!' the girl replied. Then she took me by the hand and led me around the garden

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[83] Ibid, 215

[84] Eliezer Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 60

[85] Ibrahim and Johnson-Davies, *Forty Hadith Qudsi*, 68. This hadith can also be found in Bukhari.

[86] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 278-79; this account comes from one of the sources used by Sulami, but it was reported in *Sifat al-safwa* by Ibn al-Jawzi.

until we reached the door of the palace within. She asked for it to be opened, and it opened for her. Then she said, 'Open for me the House of Vision (*iftahu-li bayta lamqa*)!'" [Rabi'a said]: "A door opened for her from which emanated brilliant rays, whose light illuminated what was in front of me and what was behind me. Then the girl said to me, 'Enter!' And I entered a house whose brilliance and beauty bewildered the sight. I do not know of anything in this World comparable to it. As we were walking around the house, a door rose before us that opened into an enclosed garden (*bustan*). The girl descended toward it and I with her. We were met by maidens (*wusafa'*) with faces like pearls, holding braziers in their hands. The girl asked them: 'What is your destination?' They said, 'We are seeking someone who died as a martyr at sea.' The girl said, 'Will you not anoint this woman [meaning me] with your incense?' They replied, 'She had the chance to receive it but she gave it up.' Then the girl let go of my hand, turned toward me, and said in verse:

'Your prayers are light when people are asleep,
'But your sleep is the sworn enemy of prayer.

'Were you to think for just a moment, you would see your life as a treasure,
'Eternally moving, departing, and passing away.'

[Rabi'a said]: "Then she disappeared from my sight, and I awoke at the appearance of dawn. By God, each time I recall her or imagine her, I lose my mind and hate myself." Then Rab'ia fell into a faint. [87]

In this account, the ascetic self is defined by acts of devotion to God, which are limited in number and can be lost forever. Nightly vigils and prayers are portrayed as an investment that produces definite and tangible rewards. If Rabi'a ceases to make deposits into her spiritual account, she cannot hope to profit from it.

The balance sheet of ritualized acts that characterized the practices of the *nasik* symbolized the instrumental aspect of Islamic asceticism. The *nasik* performed ritualized ascetic acts with specific goals in mind. According to Catherine Bell, ritual practice is by nature both situational and strategic: "It is a ceaseless play of situationally effective schemes, tactics, and strategies."[88] The *nasik* was constantly in search of effective schemes, tactics, and strategies in order to earn God's favor. This search was often visible to the public. As the performance artists of Islamic asceticism, *nussak* were regarded in the popular imagination as the "monks" (*ruhban*) of Islam. Like the Syrian Christian *ihidaya*, they often exhibited a mournful demeanor and were sometimes called "weepers" (*bakka'un*) for making the ritualized expression of sorrow part of their path. Many *nussak* also ritualized the practice of struggle against the ego (*mujahada*, also called *ijtihad* or *juhd*). Displaying a literalistic understanding of *mujahada* (the term is related in meaning to *jihad*), they put their bodies on the line as ascetic "warriors" in God's service, and

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[87] Abu Muhammad Ja'far ibn Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Sarraj al-Qari', *Masari' al-'ushshaq* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, n.d.), vol. 1, 207-8; this account is attributed to "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya the Sufi." However, because it is supposed to have come from Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Burjulani via a source from Aleppo this leaves open the possibility that it is really about Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Syria (d. before 845 CE). For more on this figure see the discussion below and in Chapter 4.
[88] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 82; I disagree with Bell's opinion that ritual practice always involves a lack of intentionality or a misrecognition of what it is meant to accomplish. While this may be the case for other religious rituals, the ritualization of ascetic practice is both conscious and intentional.

sometimes subjected themselves to personal mortifications or died on the battlefield against unbelievers.[89]

One such ascetic warrior (*mujahid mujtahid*) was 'Utba ibn Aban al-Ghulam, a disciple of al-Hasan al-Basri who lived in Basra during Rabi'a's time. Like the Syrian Christian *ihidaya*, he was noted for his penitence and sorrowful demeanor and mortified his flesh by fasting and binding himself in chains. In the end, he attained his desire to be a witness to God's truth (*shahid*) by being martyred in battle against the Byzantines.[90] Perhaps because of the instrumentality and zeal of *nussak* such as 'Utba al-Ghulam, the rationalist theologian Jahiz distrusted such ascetics and tended to regard them as extremists. Although he admired Rabi'a's reputation, by discussing her and other female Sunni ascetics along with Kharijite and Shiite women who had met their deaths through gruesome forms of execution, he implies that the practices of the *nussak* sometimes went beyond the limits of what was religiously appropriate.[91]

For Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *nusk* was the most characteristic form of asceticism practiced by Rabi'a's female predecessors and contemporaries. For Sulami, *nusk* was the outward sign of the spirituality of Sufi women. His Book of Sufi Women is full of *nasikat*, and in one case, even the elusive term *nusk* itself appears.[92] For Sulami, as for the lexicographer Ibn Manzur, the designation of a Sufi woman as *'abida* ("worshipper") or *muta'abbida* (literally, "one who acts like a slave") indicated that she was also a *nasika*. For example, in Sulami's book a woman from Jerusalem named Lubaba is called both *muta'abbida* and *nasika*.[93] She is described as a specialist in *nusk* and ascetic self-discipline (*mujahada*), and is portrayed as a ritual specialist who prescribes prayers for men the way a doctor might prescribe medicine. The instrumentality of Lubaba's approach to spirituality is revealed in her statement that the objective of making invocations to God is that "[God] will be pleased with you, that He will make you attain the station of those who find their satisfaction in Him, and that He will magnify your reputation among His protégés (*awliya'*)."[94] However, Lubaba was not only an outward ritualist. Like Rabi'a, she also had an inner dimension that was revealed by her practice of *wara'* and her sense of shame at being preoccupied with anything other than God: "I am ashamed lest God see me preoccupied with anything other than Him." For Sulami, this was a sign that Lubaba had attained *ma'rifa*, the knowledge of God. However, like other *nasikat*, her spiritual method was not one of contemplation but of action. According to Sulami's depiction of Lubaba, it is only in action where she finds her repose: "The more I am a *mujtahida* in worship, the more comfortable I become with its practice. When I become weary of human company, [my *mujahada*] allows me

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[89] A similar understanding of asceticism as a form of spiritual warfare could also be found in Syrian Christianity, where ascetic practice was discussed as a "struggle," "fight," "battle," or "war." See Arthur Voobus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* (Louvain, Belgium: Catholic University of America and Catholic University of Louvain, 1958), vol. 1, 13.

[90] Massignon, *Essay*, 114 and n. 158; there is no clear death date for 'Utba al-Ghulam in the sources.

[91] See, for example, Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 1, 194.

[92] This is in the second of Sulami's notices on Lubaba al-'Abida (or al-Muta'abbida) of Syria. See the discussion below and Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 124-5.

[93] Ibid, 82-3 and124-5

[94] Ibid, 82

to find intimacy in the invocation of God. When I get tired of talking to people, I find rest in my dedication to God and in fulfilling my service to Him."[95]

d. Faqr *(Poverty)*

The concept of *faqr* ("poverty" or "need") has become so important to Sufism that Annemarie Schimmel characterized it as "the central attitude in Sufi life."[96] Words that express this concept, such as the Arabic term *faqir* ("fakir") or the Persian term *darvish* ("dervish") have also come to stand for the Sufi in European languages. The image of a life of poverty and self-denial has become so important to the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic since the twelfth century that one could just as well call her "Rabi'a the *Faqira*." As Margaret Smith stated, "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was an ascetic who followed the path of poverty and self-denial with unwavering steps to the end."[97] In the prosopographical collection *Sifat al-safwa*, Jamal al-Din ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201 CE) includes a striking description of Rabi'a the Ascetic that confirms her reputation as a person who lived in extreme poverty.

> Muhammad ibn 'Amr said: I visited Rabi'a when she was an old woman of eighty years of age. She looked like a shrunken, old water-skin and appeared to be on the verge of collapsing. In her house, I saw a worn rectangular mat and a clothes rack made of Persian reeds, extending about two spans up from the floor. The door to the house was covered by a skin, perhaps made from mullet. There were also a jar, a mug, and a piece of felt that served as her bed and prayer rug. On the clothes rack made of reeds, she had hung her burial shrouds.[98]

The Arabic term *faqr*, "poverty," comes from the root *f-q-r*, which means, "to pierce, to bore [holes in something], to perforate." Thus, when *faqr* is used as a term for poverty, it connotes both affliction and need. In other words, the poor person (*faqir*) is like a sieve: "pierced full of holes" by the affliction of poverty, the *faqir* has nothing and cannot possess anything. It is from this sense of the root *f-q-r* that Sufis derived the meaning of *faqr* as an existential state of insufficiency or need. This is the way *faqr* is expressed in certain verses of the Qur'an as well. In several verses of the Qur'an, humanity is portrayed as poor or needy (*fuqara'*). "Poor" humanity is contrasted with God, who is "The Self-Sufficient" (*al-Ghani*, literally, "the one who needs nothing"). One of the clearest Qur'anic verses that links poverty to humanity's need for God is the following: "O humanity! You are in need of God (*antum al-fuqara' ila Allah*) but God is the Self-Sufficient (*al-Ghani*), the Praiseworthy (*al-Hamid*)" (Qur'an, 35:15). Clearly, it was not a major step for Sufis to define *faqr* as existential neediness rather than as mere physical or material deprivation.

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[95] Ibid, Arabic text 83; I have changed the translation of this statement somewhat from what is in the original version.

[96] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1986 reprint of 1975 first edition), 120

[97] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Rainbow Bridge), 20 and (Oneworld), 40

[98] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 711 and Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 276-7; this account cannot be taken as a first-hand empirical description of Rabi'a's physical condition because there is no chain of transmission (*isnad*) to support its attribution to "Muhammad ibn 'Amr."

However, given the close connection in the Qur'an between the concept of poverty and humanity's need for God, it is surprising that the intentional cultivation of poverty as a spiritual path does not seem to have been widely acknowledged in Rabi'a's time. Although this assertion may seem surprising, since some early ascetics such as Ibrahim ibn Adham were famous for giving up their wealth for a life of poverty, a close examination of early Muslim sources on asceticism indicates that those who intentionally cultivated poverty were the exception rather than the rule. Also the treatises of early Sufi theorists such as Sarraj and Kalabadhi, who discuss poverty as an important aspect of Sufism, cite virtually no one as an authority on the spiritual path of poverty who lived in the first two centuries of Islam. In their works, one finds citations of the Qur'an such as those reproduced above and traditions of the Prophet or his Companions that discuss the poverty of early Muslims; however, few citations from Rabi'a's time can be found that equate asceticism with the intentional cultivation of poverty.[99] This curious lacuna in the sources requires an explanation.

Statements attributed to Rabi'a also follow this pattern. For example, Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur reproduces an account of Rabi'a going to an *'Id* prayer with al-Hasan al-Basri's student Muhammad ibn Wasi'. Ibn Wasi', who was wearing his finest clothes for this occasion, asks Rabi'a, "What do you think of my attire?" "What should I say to you?" Rabi'a replies. "You go out among people to revive the Sunna and eliminate innovation. However, I see by your boasting about God's grace that you have caused harm to the poor person (*adkhaltum 'ala al-faqir madarratan*)." [100] In this statement, Rabi'a's reference to the poor is about the economically poor, not about those who have made themselves poor for spiritual reasons. She tells Ibn Wasi' that by dressing in his finest clothes he has made the poor feel ashamed for their poverty.

In later centuries, both the content and the meaning of Rabi'a's rebuke of Ibn Wasi' were changed from Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's version of the story. For example, in *Mir'at al-zaman* (Mirror of the Times) by the Hanbali historian Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1257 CE: the grandson of Jamal al-Din Ibn al-Jawzi), Rabi'a's concern for the feelings of the poor is replaced by a comment on the hypocrisy of religious figures that claim piety while displaying wealth. "You displayed a love of luxury and soft living and thereby you brought humiliation upon the Muslims."[101] The story changes even more dramatically in Sufi hands. In Kalabadhi's *Kitab al-ta'arruf*, which was written at the end of the tenth century CE, the figure of Rabi'a disappears from the story entirely. Instead, the subject of the story is the male Sufi Abu al-Husayn al-Nuri (d. 907-8 CE), who recites a poem about the existential meaning of poverty (*faqr*) as it came to be understood in later Sufi doctrine.[102]

As in the account from Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's *Balaghat al-nisa*, the earliest works on Islamic asceticism tend to discuss poverty as material rather than as spiritual. For example,

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[99] Similarly, the Persian Sufi Kharkushi opens his chapter on poverty and wealth in *Tahdhib al-asrar* with the following hadith: "Everything has two keys. The key to heaven is love for the poor (*al-masakin*). The persevering poor (*al-fuqara' al-subar*) will sit with God Most High on the Day of Judgment." This tradition praises those who love the poor and who are already poor, but it does not call for the cultivation of poverty as a way of life. Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*, 154

[100] Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, *Balaghat al-nisa'*, 210

[101] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 42 and (Rainbow Bridge), 22. The repetition of the same story about Rabi'a by Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur and later writers supports the contention made in Chapter 1 that Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's "Rabi'a al-Masma'iyya" is the same person as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.

[102] Kalabadhi, *al-Ta'arruf*, 67 and Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, 87

whenever the subject of poverty comes up in early works of asceticism, the discussion is literal rather than theoretical. In other words, poverty is discussed as a state of material privation rather than as a spiritual practice. In addition, the traditions used to extol poverty describe poverty more as an opportunity to practice patience (*sabr*) than as an intentional practice of deprivation. Perhaps most importantly, the infliction of physical pain through poverty, which some scholars have seen "as part of the very definition of asceticism," is largely absent from early ascetical works in Islam.[103]

The most characteristic attitude that one finds in early Muslim discussions of poverty is patient acceptance of God's will. For example, Ibn Mubarak opens his chapter on poverty in *Kitab al-zuhd* by quoting the Prophet Muhammad's Companion 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (d. 653 CE): "The two most hateful things are death and poverty, but what is more of God than wealth and poverty? I have no idea which of them I should reject because God has ordained an obligation for each. In the case of wealth, it is compassion and in the case of poverty, it is patience."[104] One of the lessons of this tradition, which sets the stage for the discussion of poverty in Ibn Mubarak's book, is that there is little value in seeking poverty for its own sake. Rather, one must accept either poverty or wealth as God's will and be prepared to fulfill the moral responsibilities required for each.[105] A statement by Ibn Mubarak cited by Kharkushi makes the same point: "The appearance of wealth in poverty is better than poverty itself" (*izhar al-ghina' fi-l-faqr ahsan min al-faqr*).[106]

The relation between poverty and patience that characterizes Ibn Mubarak's treatment of poverty brings up another observation about this concept in early Islam. To the extent that poverty was viewed as part of asceticism, it was only one of several indicators of the ascetic life. Poverty was undoubtedly common among early Muslim ascetics, but it was not seen as the quintessence of *zuhd*. Although the term *faqir* ("the poor one") eventually became a synonym for *sufi*, it does not appear originally to have been a synonym for *zahid*, "ascetic." As we saw in the previous section of this chapter, the *zahid* in early Islam was more often equated with the *nasik*, the ascetic ritualist. This understanding is reflected in one of the most important early works on Islamic asceticism, *Kitab al-zuhd* (The Book of Renunciation) by Abu Mas'ud al-Mu'afa ibn 'Imran (d. 801 CE).

Mu'afa was a student of Sufyan al-Thawri and knew Ibn Mubarak. He was born in Mosul in northern Iraq and died in the same year as Rabi'a. His book provides one of the clearest available pictures of Islamic asceticism in Rabi'a's time. For Mu'afa, poverty as an aspect of asceticism consisted primarily in avoiding the moral pitfalls of wealth and in traveling lightly through life (*khiffat al-hal*).[107] The proper attitude toward poverty was to regard oneself as God's slave (*mamluk*) and submit to God's will with patience and humility. However, if God decreed

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[103] See, for example, Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Ascetic Impulse in Religious Life," in Wimbush and Valentasis, *Asceticism*, 507.

[104] Ibn Mubarak, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 199

[105] Similar teachings can also be found in Eastern Christian asceticism. The late fourth-century CE woman ascetic Amma Theodora said that neither renunciation, nor vigils, nor self-induced suffering are able to save one's soul. Only sincere humility can do so. See Benedicta Ward trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo, Michigan and Oxford, U. K.: Cistercian Publications and A. R. Mowbray, 1984), 84.

[106] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*, 157

[107] Abu Mas'ud al-Mu'afa ibn 'Imran al-Mawsili, *Kitab al-zuhd*, ed. 'Amir Hasan Sabri (Beirut: Dar al-Bashir al-Islamiyya, 1999), 202

that one was to be rich, this was also to be borne with patience and humility. The chief value of poverty was that it made it easier for the ascetic to resist temptation. The less one possessed, the less one would be called to account for one's moral failings (*la hisaba 'alayhi*).[108] When Mu'afa cites a hadith from the Prophet stating, "The poor (*al-fuqara'*) among the believers will enter heaven forty years before the rich," the point of the lesson is not to advocate material poverty per se. Rather, it is to remind the reader of the moral burdens of wealth and power.[109]

Ascetic fasting— the systematic inducement of hunger as part of the path of renunciation— was an important aspect of poverty for early Christian anchorites. However, this practice only rarely appears in early Islamic discussions of asceticism. Some early Muslim ascetics are depicted as practicing severe forms of fasting, but this is most often discussed as part of ascetic ritualism (*nusk*). For example, in the book *Kitab al-makasib*, Muhasibi describes some ascetics in Basra as practicing what he calls "preventive hunger" (*ju' al-man'*). This involved the periodic abstention from food in order to prevent desire or foster humility.[110] According to Muhasibi, other ascetics in Basra also cultivated hunger as a means of training the soul (*al-ta'dib li-l-nafs*).[111] It is possible that Rabi'a belonged to this latter group. However, even these Basra ascetics should not be confused with Christian anchorites. Some early Muslim writers criticized Christian-style ascetic fasting for endangering the health.[112] In *Kitab al-makasib*, Muhasibi strongly criticizes ascetics who practice extreme fasting and likens Christian-style anchoretic fasting to suicide. For Muhasibi, such practices are immoral because they are contrary to human nature. In a statement that goes against later Sufi practices, he asserts, "One who encourages people to fast disobeys God, for he knows that hunger kills."[113]

Much like Muhasibi, 'Abdallah ibn Mubarak associates poverty with hunger but he does not advocate fasting as a method for inducing poverty through hunger. Instead, he is most concerned about overeating. In one of the more humorous accounts in *Kitab al-zuhd*, the Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644 CE) is making the Hajj pilgrimage with the future Umayyad Caliph Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan (d. 680 CE). During their journey, 'Umar criticizes Mu'awiya for having a stomach so big that it "almost touches the sun."[114] The point of this story is to contrast 'Umar's ascetic simplicity with the gluttony of Mu'awiya, whose Umayyad successors were criticized for their love of luxury and the pleasures of the World. Ibn Mubarak praises abstention from food as a sign of simplicity, but not as a means to induce spiritual poverty through hunger. Significantly, there is no chapter on fasting in his book. Although Ibn Mubarak encourages Muslims to follow a life of abstinence and simplicity, he does not advocate fasting to induce a

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[108] Ibid, 202-3

[109] Ibid, 204

[110] Muhasibi, *al-Makasib* in *al-Masa'il*, 226-7

[111] Ibid, 226

[112] The ascetic al-Aswad b. Yazid ibn Qays (d. 694-5 CE) of Kufa was said to have mortified his flesh so severely from fasting that it became "green and yellow." He also became blind in one eye as a result of his fasting. For this practice, his contemporaries called him "one of the monks" (*rahib min al-ruhban*). His uncle, the traditionist 'Alqama ibn Qays al-Nakha'i (d. 682 CE), criticized al-Aswad for these practices because they harmed his health. See Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 2, 102-5 and Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 507-8.

[113] Muhasibi, *al-Makasib* in *al-Masa'il*, 227

[114] Ibn Mubarak, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 203

state of permanent hunger or poverty. This appears to be because he viewed fasting primarily as a ritual observance.

Ibn Mubarak's view of fasting as a ritual observance follows that of the Qur'an. In one Qur'anic verse, fasting is described as a means of instilling awareness of God's power: "Oh you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you even as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may become aware of God" (Qur'an, 2:183). After the tenth century CE, Sufis would use this verse to justify fasting as a means to attain spiritual poverty. However, fasts are more often described in the Qur'an as having a ritual value: they are mandated as expiations (*kaffara*) for sins, such as the two-month fast for involuntary manslaughter (Qur'an, 4:92), or the three-day fast for breaking an oath (Qur'an, 5:98). The Qur'an also mentions fasting as part of a vow, such as when the Virgin Mary vows a fast to God in order to avoid having to speak to men during her pregnancy (Qur'an, 19:26). Other ritualistic fasts are mentioned in the Hadith, such as fasting three days out of every month, fasting on alternate days (which the Prophet called the "Fast of David"), fasting on the Day of 'Arafa during the Hajj pilgrimage, and fasting on Mondays and Thursdays.[115]

Qur'anic verses and Hadith accounts also insist on moderation in rituals concerning food, which further distances the practice of fasting from its use as an inducement to poverty. For example, the Qur'an alludes to Jewish Kosher regulations when it criticizes the People of the Book for being excessive in their religious practices (*la taghlu fi dinikum*) (Qur'an, 2:171). Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad specifically forbade continuous fasting, saying, "Your wife has a right over you, your visitor has a right over you, and your body has a right over you."[116] Thus, despite the fact that some Muslim ascetics practiced extreme forms of fasting, it was difficult for them to justify this practice in the face of stipulations in Qur'an and Hadith that argued for moderation. Because they strictly adhered to these scriptural teachings, Ibn Mubarak and other mainstream ascetics primarily conceived of fasting as one of the ritual obligations of Islam. To the extent that fasting had anything to do with asceticism, it was as part of *nusk*, ascetic ritualism.

The relationship between fasting and asceticism was to change significantly in later centuries, when some Sufis adopted ritualized fasting as a way of inducing a greater sense of God-consciousness. For example, the twelfth-century Andalusian Sufi Abu Madyan considered fasting so important to the Sufi Way that he begins his Sufi manual *Bidayat al-murid* (Basic Principles of the Sufi Path) with a discussion of this practice. Abu Madyan required his disciples to perform a fast called "The Fast of Intimate Union" (*sawm al-wisal*), whose origins he traced to the Prophet Moses. This was a set of ritualized ascetic practices (i.e., *manasik*), lasting up to forty days, which combined retreat, ascetic fasting, and the constant practice of invocations.[117]

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[115] See, for example, Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Nisaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, trans. 'Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1978), vol. 2, 548-53 and 561-70.

[116] Ibid, 562-63 (hadiths 2587 and 2588)

[117] See V. Cornell, *The Way of Abu Madyan*, 30-31. The Fast of Moses that Abu Madyan refers to was based on the forty-day fast performed by Moses on Mount Sinai before he received the divine revelation of the Ten Commandments. However, according to the scholar of Jewish asceticism Eliezer Diamond, "Moses' abstention from food was not a true fast; it appears not to have been a decision taken consciously on his part but rather was a natural result of his being in God's presence" (Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 95). Diamond's view of abstention from food as a byproduct of God-consciousness is similar to that of early Muslim ascetics. A more fitting biblical precedent for Abu Madyan would have been the fast

To justify this fast, Abu Madyan cites Rabi'a as an advocate of hunger as a spiritual practice. "Someone asked Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, 'By what is the Intimate united to God Most High?' 'By hunger,' she replied. Then she was asked, 'So what is hunger?' She said, 'Hunger is the act of keeping oneself away from worldly delights. One who keeps away from the delights of the World attains his goal in the Hereafter.'"[118]

Abu Madyan's depiction of Rabi'a as an advocate of hunger does not appear in any other extant source. Although on the surface this account seems to confirm that Rabi'a was one of Muhasibi's hunger artists of Basra, one could also argue that Rabi'a is not advocating the literal practice of hunger, as Abu Madyan thought she was. Rather, she is saying that all acts of renunciation are metaphorically a form of hunger, since they conform to the World/Nonworld Dichotomy. A similar sentiment can be found in Mu'afa ibn 'Imran's *Kitab al-zuhd*, which was written during Rabi'a's lifetime. In this work, Mu'afa quotes an early ascetic of Basra named 'Amir ibn 'Abd Qays (d. ca. 680 CE), who states that the World consists of four desires: money, women, sleep, and food. 'Amir claimed to have completely removed women and money from his life by renouncing them outright. However, sleep and food were another matter. They were so necessary for life that he could not decide which of them was more harmful. 'Amir's solution to this problem was to do the opposite of whatever his body desired. "My self-discipline (*juhdi*) is that when it is night I stand [in prayer] and when it is day I sleep and fast."[119] 'Amir was one of the minority of early Muslim ascetics who seems to have practiced a combination of poverty, celibacy, and ascetic fasting as integral aspects of his asceticism. However, none of these practices was an end in itself. Rather, like the fast of Abu Madyan, they were ritualized stages on the path to God-consciousness.

III. SCHOOLS AND TRADITIONS OF WOMEN'S ASCETICISM IN BASRA

In *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, Louis Massignon calls the eighth century CE the high point of Islamic asceticism.[120] During this period, which coincides with Rabi'a's life, the asceticism of the Piety-Minded became deeply embedded in the social life of the urban centers of Iraq and Syria, especially Basra and its environs. In my book *Early Sufi Women*, I identified a tradition of Muslim women's asceticism in Basra that flourished in this period.[121] In this work, I proposed that the use of educational terms such as *tilmidha* ("female student") or *mu'addiba* ("female mentor or trainer") in accounts about Rabi'a and her associates could be taken as circumstantial evidence for the existence of schools of women ascetics in the Basra region.[122] In other words, as the representative of a century-long tradition of female ascetics, the historical Rabi'a would not have been unique in her asceticism. Similarly, it is also not accurate to think of her as the founder of women's spirituality in Islam.

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of Elijah in I Kings 19, who modeled his practice after that of Moses as well, but fasted for forty days with the explicit intention of obtaining a vision of God (Ibid, 182 n. 23).

[118] V. Cornell, *The Way of Abu Madyan*, 60-61

[119] Ibn 'Imran al-Mawsili, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 312

[120] Massignon, *Essay*, 113

[121] R. Cornell, Introduction to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 60-63

[122] See Ibid and the notice on Unaysa bint 'Amr al-'Adawiyya, 102-103. These terms are also discussed at length in Chapter 1 above.

Rather, in the tropological guise of Rabi'a the Ascetic, she is more accurately described as the foremost exemplar of women's asceticism in Basra. As such, she stands on the threshold between the Proto-Sufism of her contemporaries and the more developed Sufism of her successors. We shall see in Chapter 4 that Rabi'a's interiorization of the ascetic path marked an important transition between Proto-Sufism and Sufism. However, before discussing the path of asceticism that is associated with Rabi'a, it is important first to understand the wider tradition to which she would have belonged. As noted previously, this tradition does not start with Rabi'a but goes back to the first decades of Islam.

a. The Legacy of 'A'isha

An important inspiration for the Basra tradition of women's asceticism was 'A'isha bint Abi Bakr (d. 678 CE), the widow of the Prophet Muhammad. 'A'isha herself did not found this tradition. However, Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya, who founded the school of women's asceticism in Basra, was 'A'isha's companion and is mentioned by Muslim historians as a transmitter of Hadith reports through 'A'isha. 'A'isha established a political base in Basra in the months before the Battle of the Camel in 656 CE. During this period, she and another widow of the Prophet, Hafsa bint 'Umar, called on related clans and allies to support Talha and Zubayr, Companions of the Prophet who opposed the murder of the Caliph 'Uthman (d. 656 CE) and the accession to the Caliphate of the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law 'Ali (d. 661 CE). The Battle of the Camel took place in December 656 CE and is named after the camel from which 'A'isha directed an attack against 'Ali's forces.[123] Among her strongest supporters in this battle were Rabi'a's clan of Banu 'Adi ibn Qays. The Banu 'Adi were also related to Hafsa and her father the Caliph 'Umar.[124] In this battle, 'A'isha and the rebels of Basra were defeated by the forces of 'Ali and Talha and Zubayr, the pretenders to the Caliphate, were killed. After the battle, 'A'isha retired to Medina where she spent the rest of her life. However, many of those who supported her in Basra remained active in that city.

'A'isha was noted for asceticism during the final twenty years of her life. Although she spent this period in Medina, her legacy remained in Basra through the influence of Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya. Denise Spellberg, the author of an important study of 'A'isha's legacy in Islam, sees the tropes of 'A'isha "the sage" and Rabi'a "the saint" as exemplifying "the two main paths of faith in medieval Islam."[125] However, Spellberg does not specify what these tropes entailed. Simply labeling 'A'isha a sage and Rabi'a a saint is of little use because both women are honored

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[123] For a good synopsis of historical accounts of the Battle of the Camel and 'A'isha's career after the death of the Prophet, see Nabia Abbot, *Aishah the Beloved of Mohammed* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985 reprint of 1942 first edition), 82-176. Allen L. Fromherz calls 'A'isha an "Islamic Lady of Victory" because he sees her as repeating in the Battle of the Camel a pre-Islamic Arab tradition in which noble women were used as guarantors of honor and bravery: "The battle would rage around these women until the day was decided and the feud was lost or won. The capture of a chief Lady of Victory meant the end of the battle. No man with a vestige of honor would allow a rival tribesman to approach his Lady of Victory without fighting him to the death." Allen Fromherz, "Tribalism, Tribal Feuds, and the Social Status of Women," in Sonbol, ed., *Gulf Women*, 50-53

[124] Ibid, 160

[125] Denise A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: the Legacy of 'A'isha Bint Abi Bakr* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 58

as both sages and saints in the Islamic world. In addition, Spellberg neglects to compare 'A'isha's and Rabi'a's asceticism. On this subject, she instead compares 'A'isha's asceticism after the Battle of the Camel with the Virgin Mary's distress in giving birth to Jesus. According to Spellberg, "Both Maryam and 'A'isha wish for complete oblivion during moments of personal trial: Maryam in the throes of childbirth ([Qur'an,] 19:23) and 'A'isha at the end of her life."[126] This is all that Spellberg has to say about 'A'isha's asceticism.

By contrast, Nabia Abbot's biography of 'A'isha, which was written 50 years before Spellberg's study, provides a fuller account of 'A'isha's asceticism. Abbot observes that numerous traditions "bear witness to the almost ascetic simplicity of ['A'isha's] life."[127] She notes that 'A'isha wore patched clothing and sometimes rebuked the Prophet's Companions for their extravagance. During her time in Medina, she was noted for "tearful readings of the Qur'an and long periods of fasting and prayers." At the end of her life, says Abbot, "she could not bear to live in comfort, let alone luxury, as long as she remembered the hardships and poverty of Mohammed's life."[128] However, Abbot undermines the ascetic image that she constructs of 'A'isha by casting doubt on its authenticity. She remarks, "Aishah neither stinted herself on worldly goods nor allowed her piety to curtail her social freedom."[129]

This statement is odd because many accounts contrast 'A'isha's asceticism with the behavior of her co-wife Hafsa, who was fond of comfort and luxury.[130] Although Abbot paints a contradictory picture of 'A'isha's commitment to asceticism, she admits that "Moslem traditions came in time to draw a picture of an ascetic and devout Aishah whose guiding principle in life was to live in the faith, hope for its rewards, and practice freely its charities."[131] Muhammad ibn Sa'd (d. 845 CE), who wrote one of the most influential *tabaqat* works in early Islam, quotes 'A'isha as telling her father, the Caliph Abu Bakr (d. 634 CE), that her only desires are for God, the Prophet, and the Afterlife (*al-dar al-akhira*).[132] The question left unanswered by such reports is whether the asceticism that 'A'isha practiced at the end of her life was a consequence of her remorse for causing the disaster of the Battle of the Camel or whether she advocated asceticism as part of a new approach to spirituality in general. Ibn Hanbal lends support to the remorse hypothesis by quoting 'A'isha as saying after the battle, "I wish that I were a barren tree and had

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[126] The Qur'anic statement of Mary in the throes of childbirth, "Would that I had died before this and had been forgotten without a trace" (*ya laytani mittu qabla hadha wa kuntu nasiyyan mansiyyan*), is almost identical to a statement reported of 'A'isha after the Battle of the Camel: "I wish that I had been forgotten without a trace" (*wadidtu anni kuntu nasiyyan mansiyyan*). See Ibid, 167-8. For the original version of this account, see Ibn Hanbal, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 164.

[127] Abbot, *Aishah*, 212

[128] Ibid; Abbot's references to 'A'isha's asceticism are taken from Ibn Sa'd. See idem, *al-Tabaqat al-kubra*, vol. 7, 271-84.

[129] Abbot, *Aishah*, 213

[130] See, for example, Mu'afa ibn 'Imran, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 279, where Hafsa urges her father the Caliph 'Umar to take better care of himself. This account may be contrasted with another from the same source (287), where 'A'isha testifies to the simplicity of the Prophet Muhammad's dress and demeanor. See also, Ibn Hanbal, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 116, where Hafsa asks her father to allocate a greater share to his family from the public treasury.

[131] Abbot, *Aishah*, 213-14

[132] Ibn Sa'd *al-Tabaqat al-kubra*, vol. 7, 277

never been born!"[133] By contrast, both Ibn Mubarak and Mu'afa ibn 'Imran— who were Rabi'a
al-'Adawiyya's contemporaries— mention 'A'isha as the source of a teaching on sincerity that
later traditionists such as Ibn Hanbal attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: "Do not show off in
your acts of worship. Instead, practice humility, for humility is the most excellent act of
worship."[134]

b.   The School of Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya and Instrumental Asceticism

As noted in Chapter 1, the first school of women's asceticism in Basra appears to have
been founded by Mu'adha bint 'Abdallah al-'Adawiyya (d. 702 CE). Mu'adha was the wife of
Sila ibn Ushaym al-'Adawi (d. 694-5 CE), a noted ascetic and *mujahid* who died as a martyr
along with their son.[135] In her younger days, Mu'adha was a companion and political supporter
of 'A'isha in Basra and transmitted Hadith reports from 'A'isha to important male religious
figures such as al-Hasan al-Basri.   Along with Umm al-Darda' al-'Alima ("The Authority," d.
699 CE), Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya and Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya are the most famous female religious
figures of Basra. As her name indicates, Mu'adha belonged to the same clan of Banu 'Adi ibn
Qays as Rabi'a. An account in Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa* states that she and her husband were
early exemplars of the tradition of asceticism for which the clan of Banu 'Adi ibn Qays was
famous.[136] My theory that the group of female ascetics who gathered around Mu'adha made up a
school of ascetics is based on Sulami's notice on Mu'adha's disciple Unaysa bint 'Amr al-
'Adawiyya (d. ca. 720 CE). In this account, Unaysa is called Mu'adha's "student" (*tilmidha*).[137]
The image of a school that this appellation implies is reinforced by an earlier account in Ibn
Sa'd's *al-Tabaqat al-kubra*, where Mu'adha is depicted with her legs drawn up (*muhtabiya*) and
teaching a group of women, who sit in a circle around her.[138]

Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya also appears to have been responsible for introducing the way of
disciplined servitude (*ta'abbud*) that for Sulami epitomized the spiritual path of women's Sufism.
As befits an early leader of the Piety-Minded, her approach to religion was highly moralistic and
her spiritual practices stressed prayer and the performance of night-vigils. She is depicted as
praying 600 prostrations in a twenty-four hour period and reading the Qur'an at night in a
standing position.[139] The importance given to such practices indicates that Mu'adha was a
nasika, a practitioner of ascetic ritualism. Her name, *Mu'adha*, may be symbolic because it refers
to the custom of seeking divine protection (*isti'adha*) against external enemies such as Satan.
The use of symbolic names also appears to have been common among her followers. Ghufayra
al-'Abida (d. after 720 CE), who was one of Mu'adha's most noted disciples, also had a symbolic
name. The term *ghufayra* refers to the forgiveness of sins (*ghufran*), while the term *'abida* means

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[133] Ibn Hanbal, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 164

[134] Mu'afa ibn 'Imran, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 249-50 and n. 4; Ibn Mubarak's version is slightly different: "Verily
you forget that the most excellent form of worship is humility." See idem, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 122.

[135] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 707; see also, Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 266-9.

[136] Ibid, 22 and Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 264

[137] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 102-103

[138] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-kubra*, vol. 8, 483

[139] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 707 and Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 264

"worshipper."[140] Likewise, the name of Mu'adha's disciple Unaysa al-'Adawiyya means "Little Female Intimate [of God]." [141]

   The most important doctrinal characteristic of Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya and her students was their instrumental approach to asceticism. The term *instrumental asceticism* was first coined by Eliezer Diamond to characterize the ascetic practices of rabbinic Judaism. These practices involved "the passionate commitment to a spiritual quest so consuming that one feels it necessary to minimize or eliminate worldly pursuits and pleasures because they detract from or distract one from one's godly objectives."[142] What makes the rabbinic attitude toward asceticism instrumental is that ascetic practice is focused on specific objectives. Likewise, in early Islam, the practice of asceticism was most often in pursuit of specific and identifiable goals. Muslim instrumental ascetics sought to obtain a specific result for their ascetic practices as part of a bargain or transaction with God.[143] The instrumentality of Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya's asceticism is apparent in the following statement that she made to her disciple Umm al-Aswad bint Zayd al-'Adawiyya: "By God, my daughter! My desire to continue living in this world is neither for the sake of luxury nor of relaxation. By God, I desire to continue living only so that I may get closer to my Lord the Glorious and Mighty through acts of worship, in the hope that He would grant me the pleasure of joining [my husband] Abu al-Sahba' and his son in heaven."[144] In this account, Mu'adha explains that she practices asceticism mainly for the purpose of convincing God to let her join her husband and son in the Afterlife.

   Also like Eliezer Diamond's rabbinic ascetics, Mu'adha and her disciples rejected the World not only because it was a source of temptation and sin, but also because worldly affairs distracted them from worship. Mu'adha was noted for minutely managing her day in order to leave little time for anything but religious practices. According to Sulami, she did not lift her gaze up to the sky for forty years. She did not eat during the day and did not sleep at night. When told that she was causing harm to herself with these practices, she excused herself by saying, "I have merely postponed one time for another. I have postponed sleep from night until day and have postponed food from day until night."[145] In other words, Mu'adha used ascetic ritualism (*nusk*) to turn the daytime fasts and nighttime prayers that are normally associated with the month of Ramadan into a daily routine. If she was overcome by the need for sleep during her

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[140] In the edited version of Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa* (vol. 2, 714) and other sources, Ghufayra's name is given as *'Afira* or *'Ufayra*. Since the Arabic word *'affara* means "dusty," *'Uffayra* might mean "The Little Dusty One." However, this does not seem to be a likely appellation. *Ghufayra* is a more probable name, in that it derives from the well-established Islamic notion of *ghufran* (forgiveness). The literal meaning of *Ghufayra* is "The Little Woman Who Grants Forgiveness." This fits Ibn al-Jawzi's description of Ghufayra as a person who was sought out by people for intercessory prayers. The apparent mistake in rendering her name could have been the result of an early copyist eliminating a single dot, which marks the difference between the letter *'ayn* (for 'Ufayra) and the letter *ghayn* (for Ghufayra).

[141] Of course, these names could also have been tropes bestowed by early writers. If this were the case, they would still have been important as symbolic references.

[142] Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 12-13

[143] Instrumental asceticism also existed in early Christianity. In Latin Christianity the term *instrumentum satisfactiones* was used to refer to ascetic practices that were intended as instruments of salvation. See Sebastian Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," in idem, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), 8.

[144] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 708 and Sulami, Appendix to *Early Sufi Women*, 268

[145] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 88

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nighttime vigils, she would wander around her house reminding herself, "Oh soul! Eternal sleep is ahead of you. If I were to die, your repose in the grave would be a long one, whether it was sorrowful or happy."[146]

The women ascetics of Basra also shared with Jewish and Christian ascetics the notion that sincere piety demanded separation from humanity in both word and deed. *Perishut*, the Hebrew word most often translated as "asceticism," connotes separation, especially from things or people that are regarded as impure.[147] Mu'adha's disciple Unaysa bint 'Amr al-'Adawiyya was a practitioner of what Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) called *al-zuhd fi-l-halal*, a type of ascetic perfectionism that involved the renunciation even of things that were permissible for the ordinary believer.[148] This concept is also found in Jewish asceticism, where *qedusha* (Heb.) "holiness," results from foregoing even what is permitted.[149] Similarly in early Syrian Christianity, the *qaddish* or holy man was "someone apart from his surroundings, someone who has alienated himself from, and is unattached to the world he lives in."[150]

Sometimes, however, the act of separation from ordinary believers might paradoxically involve entering into society instead of withdrawing from it. For some Basra women ascetics, separation from ordinary women involved earning a living in public, something that most Muslim women at that time did not pursue. In an account that originally came from Abu al-Husayn al-Burjulani's ninth-century *Kitab al-ruhban*, Unaysa bint 'Amr is quoted as saying, "My spirit has never resisted anything that I compelled it to do more strongly than the avoidance of eating what is permissible and earning a living (*kasb*)."[151] In other words, Unaysa's practice of asceticism led her to act in ways that were not normal for the ordinary Muslim woman. This is a rare example of the ethical aspect of asceticism, in which *wara'* is not expressed as avoidance but as involvement in a sphere of activity that would have been avoided under normal circumstances.

c. The Weeping Women (*al-Bakiyat*) of Basra

Wherever it occurs, instrumental asceticism is practiced in a religious environment in which the market provides the primary model for the moral economy of divine rewards and punishments. In rabbinic Judaism, says Eliezer Diamond, "Man *owes* God obedience, and every sin, whether of commission or of omission, is a defaulted obligation, a debt."[152] In Christianity, Paul of Tarsus says in his Letter to the Romans, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans, 6:23). *Surat al-Baqara* of the Qur'an asks, "Who will grant Allah a generous loan? He will repay him many times over" (Qur'an, 2:245). Behind each of these examples is the notion that a moral economy governs the relationship between righteousness and sinfulness on the one hand, and

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[146] Ibid

[147] Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 85-6

[148] See Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa reprint, n.d.), vol. 4, 229 (Kitab al-faqr wa al-zuhd); in this passage, Ghazali attributes the origin of this concept to Ibrahim ibn Adham.

[149] Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 81-2

[150] Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 9; see also, Voobus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. 1, 104-106.

[151] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 102

[152] Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 67

reward and punishment on the other. In this economy of faith and morals, says Diamond, "God has created a system of debits, credits, rewards and punishments and he operates within its confines."[153]

In both Jewish and early Islamic asceticism, the divine economy of morals was seen as a zero-sum game, in which the portions allotted to the believer in this life and the Hereafter were strictly controlled. In rabbinic Judaism, this led to the belief that any pleasure enjoyed in the World might be deducted from the store of rewards being held on account in the next world.[154] The same notion of limited goods lies behind the statement of Rabi'a to Sufyan al-Thawri that was cited in the section on *nusk* above: "You are but a numbered set of days. When one day goes, a part of you goes as well. And when the part is lost, the whole is sure to be lost too." In such an environment, the ascetic fears the consequences of even the least of her actions because each mistake or sin of omission is likely to diminish one's reward in heaven. In early Islamic asceticism, this belief caused the awareness of God's power (*taqwa*) to be felt as fear of retribution (*khawf*) and led to such religious expressions as preoccupation with ritual observances (*nusk*) or extreme caution with regard to issues of moral doubt (*wara'*). Among some women ascetics of Basra, this ethic also led to weeping (*buka'*). Ascetic weeping was such a widespread practice in Rabi'a's time that the jurist Malik ibn Anas devoted an entire chapter of *al-Muwatta'* to "The Excellence of Weeping out of Fear of God."[155] Malik's contemporary Ibn Mubarak believed that if newly learned information about God does not move one to weep it is of no benefit at all.[156]

Religious weeping is justified in Islam by a verse of the Qur'an that mentions weeping as a sign of the recognition of divine truth: "When the Qur'an is recited to those who were given knowledge before it . . . they fall down on their faces weeping, and it increases them in humility" (Qur'an, 17:109). Although Hadith reports disapprove of lamentations and hiring professional mourners at funerals, weeping while recalling the inevitability of death is approved.[157] Weeping appears to have been a widespread practice among the ascetics of Basra in the interregnal period between the Umayyad and the Abbasid dynasties in the mid-eighth century CE. Massignon cites several residents of Basra during this period that he identifies as *Bakka'un* (Weepers), including Salih al-Murri (d. 792-93 CE), who is often mentioned as an associate of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.[158]

William Chittick rejects this classification in a recent article on weeping in Islam, saying, "Despite the opinions of some of the Orientalists . . . there is no evidence that there was a group of people known by this label."[159] Whether or not Chittick is right about Massignon's use of the term *bakka'un* for people like Salih al-Murri, he is not correct in claiming that there was no label characterizing a class of ascetics as weepers. In his Book of Sufi Women, Sulami characterizes

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[153] Ibid

[154] Ibid, 68

[155] Malik, *al-Muwatta'*, 176

[156] Ibn Mubarak, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 41; this important text was overlooked by William C. Chittick in his article, "Weeping in Classical Sufism," in Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley, eds. *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 132-44. This oversight caused Chittick to conclude incorrectly that the early Sufi tradition did not devote much attention to the practice of weeping.

[157] Chittick, "Weeping in Classical Sufism," 143 n. 4

[158] Massignon, *Essay*, 114

[159] Chittick, "Weeping in Classical Sufism," 133

the late eighth-century ascetic Sha'wana of al-Ubulla as "one of the weepers (*al-bakiyat*), and one who induces others to weep (*al-mubkiyat*)."[160] Clearly, since Sulami saw the need to classify weepers into two separate categories, a well-established tradition of ascetic weeping must have existed in his time and probably in early Islam as well. Three women ascetics of the Basra region, spanning the period from Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya to the generation just before Rabi'a, illustrate this tradition and its role in early Islamic asceticism.[161]

Ghufayra al-'Abida (d. ca. 720 CE) was one of the most important disciples of Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya. She apparently was an important figure in the now lost *Kitab al-ruhban* of Burjulani, who claims that she wept until she became blind.[162] As mentioned earlier, Ghufayra's nickname, *al-'Abida*, means "The Worshipper" and refers to the fact that she was a practitioner of ascetic ritualism (*nusk*). As we have seen, ascetic ritualism is associated with the notion that the relationship between the human being and God is framed in terms of obligations and debts. This is illustrated by Ghufayra's response when someone sympathizes with her for her blindness: "Being veiled from God is worse [than blindness]. And the blindness of the heart from understanding what God desires from His commands is even greater."[163] In this statement, Ghufayra complains that ignorance of God is a sin because it prevents people from knowing the extent of their obligations toward God, even before trying to fulfill them.

Ibn al-Jawzi's account of Ghufayra in the book *Sifat al-safwa* provides further evidence that her weeping was due to the fear that her balance sheet of pious and virtuous acts would come up short on the Day of Judgment. "I have sinned against you, oh God, with each of my extremities. By God, if you aid me, I will do my best to obey you with every extremity with which I have disobeyed you."[164] In another account, we see that for Ghufayra, weeping seems to have been a way of adding extra credit to her balance sheet. When asked if she becomes depressed from crying so much, she replies, "How could someone who has fallen ill from something become weary of that which contains the cure for her illness?"[165] Nothing, including a visit by her favorite nephew, was capable of drawing Ghufayra away from her fear of the trials that she needed to undergo in order to pass from the World to the Nonworld: "By God, I cannot find any place for joy in my heart while I am thinking of the Hereafter. The news of my nephew's arrival reminded me of the day of my encounter with God. So I find myself between joy and devastation."[166]

A similarly fear-based asceticism motivated the weeping of 'Ubayda bint Abi Kilab (d. ca. 745 CE), a noted woman ascetic from a village outside of Basra who lived in the generation after Ghufayra. Sulami refers to 'Ubayda as "sound in judgment" (*'aqila*), which indicates that

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[160] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 106-7

[161] The Egyptian writer Su'ad 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, quoting a statement of her uncle, Shaykh al-Azhar Mustafa 'Abd al-Raziq (d. 1950), claims that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was "the first to place the principles of love and sorrow in the temple of Islamic mysticism." However, except for Ibn al-Jawzi, no early writer describes Rabi'a as weeping to the extent that she would be considered one of the "weepers" of Basra. See Su'ad 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya bayn al-ghina' wa al-buka'* (Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya between Wealth and Weeping) (Cairo: The Anglo-Egyptian Book Shop, 1982), 129.

[162] See Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, who cites Burjulani in the *isnad* of his account, 96.

[163] Ibid

[164] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 714 and Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 286

[165] Ibid, 287; this account also came from Burjulani's *Kitab al-ruhban*.

[166] Ibid

she was not considered insane or hysterical for her weeping.[167] For twenty years, she associated with Malik ibn Dinar (d. 745 CE), a famous disciple of al-Hasan al- Basri. 'Ubayda would often visit Ibn Dinar in the company of 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Salman, a preacher who practiced pious retreats in an underground cell (*sardab*) beneath his house.[168] According to the Sufi prosopographer Isfahani, Ibn Salman's spiritual practice was also based on the fear of God. Whenever he mentioned the Day of Judgment in his sermons, he would cry out, and others in the audience who followed a similar path would respond to him. At times, we are told, people would drop dead from the terror of God's judgment in his teaching sessions.[169] Motivated by a similar fear of divine judgment, 'Ubayda wept for forty years until she became blind. The self-mortification that she practiced led her to hope for death, both to earn martyrdom through spiritual combat and to release herself from the moral dangers of the World: "By God, every morning I get up fearing that I will commit a sin against myself that will lead to my perdition on the Day of Judgment!"[170] The notion of asceticism as martyrdom is characteristic of instrumental asceticism because martyrdom is sought instrumentally as a key to heaven. In the market-based ethic of limited good followed by 'Ubayda, every day carried the danger of sins of omission and commission that might cause her moral account to end up with a negative balance. This attitude is also a common characteristic of instrumental asceticism.

What might be described as a "science of weeping" characterized the ascetic practice of Sha'wana (d. ca. 770 CE), a contemporary of Rabi'a who was the most important woman ascetic of the Iraqi port city of al-Ubulla. Accounts of Sha'wana's weeping confirm Massignon's contention that the Weepers of the Basra region made up a category of ascetics that was separate from other practitioners of asceticism. In his short notice on Sha'wana, Sulami tells us that she recited the Qur'an and preached to the public and that her lectures were attended by several categories of the Piety-Minded. These included renunciants (*zuhhad*), worshippers (*'ubbad*), intimates of God (*mutaqarribun*), "masters of hearts" (*arbab al-qulub*), and female practitioners of self-mortification (*mujahidat*). As for Sha'wana herself, Sulami classifies her as one of the self-disciplinarians (*mujtahidat*), the fearful (*kha'ifat*), the weepers (*bakiyat*), and the inducers of weeping (*mubkiyat*).[171]

The more detailed account of Sha'wana by Ibn al-Jawzi confirms another of Massignon's theories: that weeping as a spiritual practice in Basra was connected doctrinally to al-Hasan al-Basri's teachings about sorrow (*huzn*).[172] A major source of information about Sha'wana was Malik ibn Daygham, the son of Daygham ibn Malik, a student of Hasan and one of the first people to refer to himself as a Sufi.[173] Daygham was curious about Sha'wana but because of his advanced age, he could not travel from Basra to al-Ubulla to see her. Thus, on several occasions

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[167] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 134-5

[168] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 715 and Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 290

[169] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 6, 243-5. One of those who dropped dead from 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Salman's sermons may have been Rabi'a's student Maryam of Basra. See Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 84.

[170] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 715 and Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 290

[171] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 106-7

[172] Massignon, *Essay*, 114 n. 158

[173] See Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 682-4. Ibn al-Jawzi suggests that Daygham ibn Malik's ritualistic approach to asceticism was due to his mother, who was a Bedouin. He was said to be unique in his sadness and the extent to which he afflicted his body with austerities. He said, "If I knew that it would bring about God's satisfaction, I would call upon the cleaver to cut my flesh into pieces."

he sent his son Malik, who reported to him on Sha'wana's condition. Often, her bouts of weeping were so severe that her guests became embarrassed and had to leave. One ascetic complained that he stopped attending Sha'wana's gatherings because her profuse weeping made it impossible to understand what she had to say. Sha'wana defended herself from such criticism saying, "Any one of you who is able to weep should weep or at least be compassionate toward the one who weeps. For the weeper only weeps because of his awareness of what has affected his soul."[174] At one point, she was so overcome by grief that she could neither pray nor perform other acts of worship. Then a visitor came to her in her dreams and recited the following verses:

> Scatter tears from your eyes if you are truly distressed,
> For wailing heals the sorrowful.
>
> Strive, stand, and fast steadfastly at all times,
> For steadfastness comes from obedience.[175]

The most interesting accounts about Sha'wana reported by Ibn al-Jawzi are descriptions of her tears. In one account, she says: "By God, I want to weep until I run out of tears. Then I will weep blood until not a single drop of blood is left in my body. This is how far I am from real weeping!"[176] One day, Daygham ibn Malik received a man from al-Ubulla who described Sha'wana's weeping. Daygham asked detailed questions about her weeping: "How does she begin her weeping?" "Whenever she begins a session of invocation, you will see tears pouring from her eyelids like rain." "Which are more abundant— the tears coming from the inner corner of the eye beside the nose, or the tears coming from the outer corner of the eye beside the temple?" "Her tears are too numerous to distinguish one from another. From the moment she begins her invocations, they flow, all at once, from the four parts of her eyes." Then Daygham wept and said, "It seems to me that fear has burned up her entire heart! It has been said that an increase or decrease of tears is proportional to the extent of the burning of the heart. When the heart has been fully consumed, the practitioner of sorrow (*al-hazin*) can weep whenever he wants to do so. Thus, the smallest amount of invocation will cause him to weep."[177]

Daygham's assessment of Sha'wana's weeping recalls Herbert W. Basser's discussion of the tradition of weeping in rabbinic Judaism. According to Basser, tears are an important supplement to prayers because penitential tears stir up divine passion.[178] In Jewish traditions God weeps, the angels weep, and the Prophets Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses weep. Weeping is also a common theme in the Book of Psalms. Tears, says Basser, are the medium of an unspoken theology: "The mystery of crying is that through tears the outside worlds and the interior worlds merge deep inside the human spirit."[179] The tears of Sha'wana, like those of the sages in rabbinic texts, may express either remorse or despair, but in every case, they express deep religious yearnings. In later Jewish mysticism, weeping was one of the rituals of *Tikkun Olam*— acts of

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[174] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 727-9 and Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 300

[175] Ibid, vol. 2, 728 and Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 302

[176] Ibid, vol. 2, 727-8 and Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 300

[177] Ibid, vol. 2, 727 and Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 298

[178] Herbert W. Basser, "A Love for all Seasons: Weeping in Jewish Sources," in Patton and Hawley, *Holy Tears*, 180

[179] Ibid, 185

world-restoration that allowed divine and human tears to flow together. In this tradition, much as in early Islamic asceticism, a distinction was made between the oily upper tear and the watery lower tear.[180] When Sha'wana's tears flowed "all at once, from the four parts of her eyes," this was a sign of divine union, in which the divine and human waters flowed together to quench the burning of her heart.

The example of Sha'wana also brings to mind the early Christian tradition of weeping (Gr. *penthos*). For early Christians, weeping was seen as "the purified passion experienced by the penitent who, through the pricking of conscience, accepts his or her need to repent in order to be restored to God."[181] The Greek term *penthountes* and the Western Aramaic term *abiluta* describe a state of repentance that was often expressed by early Christians through lamentations and the continuous shedding of tears.[182] Accounts of the Weeping Women of Basra indicate that the connotation of these Christian terms was similar to the Muslim understanding of the Arabic word *huzn*, "sorrow." In early Christianity, the grief that led to weeping was considered a "joy-bearing grief" because the penitent's approach to God ultimately led to redemption and salvation.

Bishop Kallistos Ware describes a science of tears and redemptive weeping in Orthodox Christianity that is similar to that of Sha'wana in Islam. In the Orthodox tradition, the tears of the ascetic are both "bitter" and "sweet." Bitter tears, which flow from the lower part of the eye, express contrition for sin and act as a form of purification. Sweet tears, which flow from the upper part of the eye, reflect a "transfiguring spiritualizing of the senses" and act as a form of illumination. This is because they express joy at the eventual reconciliation between the penitent ascetic and God.[183]

However, just because the Islamic tradition of ascetic weeping shares similarities with rabbinic Jewish weeping and Christian penitential weeping, this does not necessarily mean that the Weepers of Basra copied their practices from Jews or Christians. The student of comparative asceticism should not use superficial similarities to jump to hasty conclusions about the supposed origins of ascetic practices. Correspondences between Sufi statements and the teachings of early Church figures do not necessarily imply that the Christian tradition of monasticism had a "pervasive" influence on the development of Islamic spirituality, as Albert Hourani and other Christian scholars of Islam have supposed.[184] The same lesson holds true for the supposed differences between these traditions. Not enough comparative research has been done on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim ascetic weeping to allow Hannah Hunt, for example, to conclude that Muslim weeping "is devoid of the joy-bearing grief of *penthos*."[185]

IV. THE ASCETICISM OF RABI'A AND HER CIRCLE

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[180] Ibid, 187

[181] Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief*, 3

[182] Ibid, 8

[183] See Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Oxford, U. K.: Oxford University Press, 1979) and idem, "The Orthodox Experience of Repentance," *Sobornost*, vol. 2:1 (1980), 18-28, cited in Ibid, 32 and n. 142.

[184] See, for example, Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 72-73

[185] Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief*, 18

a. Rabi'a's Students and Associates

In his Book of Sufi Women, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami discusses ten women ascetics who were contemporaries of Rabi'a in Basra and the surrounding region. Of these women, only one is specifically mentioned as a student of Rabi'a. This is Maryam of Basra (d. before 801 CE), whose spiritual path was based on the doctrine of divine love (*mahabba*), and whose ascetic practices included night-vigils and the entrustment of all personal affairs to God (*al-thiqa bi-llah* or *tawakkul*).[186] Although it is important to beware of superficial religious comparisons, Sulami's notice on Maryam of Basra cannot help but leave the student of comparative asceticism with the impression that Christian ascetics influenced her practices. Reminiscent of Christian themes are Maryam's name (Mary), the importance she gives to love, and the verse of the Qur'an that she was fond of reciting in her night vigils: "Gracious is God toward his servants" (Qur'an, 42:19). This Qur'anic verse describes God's love for His servants in a way that is reminiscent of the Christian concept of divine grace.[187] Also reminiscent of Christian asceticism is Maryam of Basra's celibacy. The practice of celibacy by a number of early Muslim ascetics including Rabi'a was one reason why Western scholars such as Margaret Smith sought the origins of Islamic asceticism in Christianity. The issue of Rabi'a's celibacy will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, which discusses the trope of Rabi'a the Lover.

Another reputed student of Rabi'a was 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal. 'Abda ("female slave") appears as an important source of information on Rabi'a in Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa* but is not mentioned by Sulami in his Book of Sufi Women. She was supposed to have been Rabi'a's servant at the end of the latter's life and may have replaced Maryam of Basra in this capacity. As we saw in Chapter 1, 'Abda is noted as the source of accounts of dream visions of Rabi'a, such as when she sees Rabi'a after death in a bright green dress and wearing a veil made of green silk brocade. Rabi'a tells her in the dream that the original shroud and woolen veil with which her body was wrapped for burial were taken up to the Heaven of *'Illiyyin* (Qur'an, 83:18-21).[188] It is possible that the stories about 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal provided a connection between the practices of Rabi'a and other women ascetics of Basra and early Syrian Sufism. As we shall see in Chapter 4, a major figure of early Syrian Sufism was Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d. 830 CE), who moved from Basra to Syria with some of his disciples. One of these disciples, Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari (d. 845 CE), is the main source of Sulami's accounts about Maryam of Basra. There is also evidence that Darani and his followers knew 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal.[189]

A unique account in an unusual source provides the only extant reference to a possible teacher of Rabi'a. This is Hayyuna, a female ascetic of the second half of the eighth century CE.

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[186] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 84-85; as discussed earlier in this chapter, *tawakkul* is an important part of *wara'* and is treated prominently in Muhasibi's *Kitab al-makasib*.

[187] The early fifth century CE Syrian Christian ascetic Makarios the Great stated: "Manifold are the patterns of grace, and most varied are the ways it leads the soul. Sometimes, as God decides, grace gives rest to the soul, at other times it puts it to work." John Anthony MCGuckin, *The Book of Mystical Chapters: Meditations on the Soul's Ascent, from the Desert Fathers and other Early Christian Contemplatives* (Boston and London: Shambhala Books, 2003), 146-7

[188] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 712 and Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 280

[189] Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari was well-known among later Sufis for transmitting traditions on Christian asceticism and love mysticism. See Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 10, 5-33. Further information on Ibn Abi al-Hawari can be found in Sulami's *Tabaqat al-sufiyya* and Qushayri's *Risala*.

Hayyuna lived in the port city of al-Ubulla and may also have been the teacher of Sha'wana. She appears in a work called *'Uqala' al-Majanin* by al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Nisaburi (d. 1016 CE). The term *'uqala al-majanin* literally means "the rationally insane," and refers to individuals who were considered mad by the general public but whose supposed madness actually concealed profound wisdom.[190] Ibn al-Jawzi may have been aware of this work because he uses the term *'uqala' al-majanin* to describe several of the women ascetics who appear in *Sifat al-safwa*.[191] Significantly, Rabi'a does not appear as a "rational madwoman" in Nisaburi's book. However, Hayyuna does appear prominently in *'Uqala' al-Majanin*, where she is depicted as a teacher of love mysticism.[192] What made her appear to be a madwoman was her tendency to go into raptures out of her love for God. According to Nisaburi, Rabi'a used to visit Hayyuna frequently. One night, in the middle of her devotions, Rabi'a fell asleep and Hayyuna kicked her awake, saying, "Get up! The wedding of the Guided Ones (*'urs al-muhtadin*) has come! Oh, one who beautifies the Brides of the Night (*'ara'is al-layl*) by means of night-vigils!"[193] The importance of this account for the development of love mysticism in early Sufism will be discussed in the next chapter. For the present, the reference to night-vigils may be taken as evidence that Hayyuna and her students practiced *nusk*, ascetic ritualism.

   b.   *From Instrumental Asceticism to Essential Asceticism*

        In the previous section of this chapter, the concept of *instrumental asceticism* was introduced to characterize ascetic practices that were directed toward specific and identifiable goals. Instrumental asceticism was closely related to the ascetic ritualism of *nusk*, which also conceived of the worshipper's relationship with God as a set of ritual obligations and moral duties. Rabi'a's contemporary 'Ajrada the Blind (*al-'Amiya*) exemplifies this type of asceticism. She fasted continuously for 60 years, wept and lamented constantly, and passed the night in prayer-vigils. Although a modern observer might view these behaviors as signs of depression, for 'Ajrada they were not spontaneous or uncontrolled actions. Instead, they were calculated behaviors that she described as part of a competition among ascetics for divine favor and spiritual status. The better and more often one performed rituals of worship, the higher one rose in the hierarchy of the holy. This can be seen in the following supplication attributed to 'Ajrada: "For your sake, oh God, the worshippers cut themselves off from the World in the darkness of night,

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[190] For an extensive discussion of *'Uqala' al-majanin* and its author, see Michael W. Dols, *Majnun: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, ed. Diana E. Immisch (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 1992), 349-65.

[191] For example, Rayhana "The Enraptured" (*al-waliha*), who flourished in the middle of the eighth century CE, is listed by Ibn al-Jawzi under the category of "The Rationally Insane of al-Ubulla." See idem, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 729 and Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 306.

[192] See al-Hasan ibn Muhammad ibn Habib al-Nisaburi, *"Uqala' al-majanin*, ed. Muhammad Bahr al-'Ulum (Najaf, Iraq: al-Maktaba al-Haydariyya, 1968), 149

[193] Ibid. The trope of a God-fearing woman kicking a sleeping student or spouse awake is common in texts about Muslim ascetics. Sulami uses this trope in an account about Kurdiyya bint 'Amr, the servant of Sha'wana of al-Ubulla. Sha'wana admonishes Kurdiyya saying, "This is not the abode of sleep! Verily, sleep is reserved for cemeteries!" Ibn al-Jawzi also uses this trope in his account of the wife of Riyah al-Qaysi (d. 796 CE), who kicks her husband awake, saying, "The night has left and with it the army of the righteous, while you were asleep. I fear that you have deluded me, oh Riyah!" See Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 116 and Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 721.

glorifying you from nightfall until the predawn hours, competing for your mercy and the favor of your forgiveness. So through you, my God, and none other, I ask you to put me in the first rank of the Foremost, that you raise me up to the level of your Intimates, and that you count me among your righteous servants."[194]

A second type of asceticism that was important in Rabi'a's time was asceticism as a form of protest, particularly against the unequal distribution of wealth in the Abbasid Empire at the height of its power and influence. This type of asceticism, which was central to the moral outlook of the Piety-Minded as described by Marshall Hodgson, can be termed *reactionary asceticism*. The French historian Maurice Lombard has painted a vivid portrait of social and economic conditions in the early Abbasid period, which he derived in part from the writings of Nestorian and Jacobite Christian observers. One of the most important of these Christian observers was Pseudo-Denys of Tell Mahre, who was a contemporary of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. According to Lombard's interpretation of this source, the economic life of early Abbasid society was impacted by a major influx of gold and a rise in the production of consumer goods. These economic factors caused a rise in price inflation, which benefited court circles and the merchant class but caused hardship for the lower classes.[195] Great numbers of the landless poor migrated from the countryside to the urban centers of Iraq and Egypt. Because of this growth in the pool of available labor, the salaries of workers could not keep up with the rising prices caused by inflation. As more and more country people moved to the cities, merchants and government officials bought up rural landholdings at discount prices. This "urban invasion of the countryside" resulted in the breakup of earlier patterns of land tenure. According to Lombard, "Wealth began to be expressed in chattels instead of real estate . . . This disintegration of the domanial (*sic*.) structure brought with it social upheaval: the uprisings of the humbler country-folk matched the slave and plebeian uprisings in the cities."[196] This discontent of the lower classes was reflected in the practice of reactionary asceticism.

However, despite this social unrest, great fortunes could still be made. The cargo of a single ship from China docking at the port of al-Ubulla might be worth 500,000 gold dinars.[197] According to Lombard, "The merchant lived on a grandiose scale in his stately townhouse, surrounded by a host of slaves and hangers-on, in the midst of his collections of books, travel souvenirs, and rare ornaments."[198] By contrast, the towns and villages around the great urban centers were the refuge of ruined landowners and poor rural laborers. Tax farmers and money-lenders in the cities forced small landowners off their lands for defaulted loans and non-payment of taxes, "which grew in proportion with the fall of the purchasing power of the currency . . . The only recourse was to run away from the villages. Everywhere there were refugees, displaced persons wandering aimlessly in an attempt to evade the taxes and their urban creditors, and gradually slipping into brigandage."[199] The Proto-Sufi and former highwayman Fudayl ibn 'Iyad,

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[194] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 712-13 and Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 284

[195] Maurice Lombard, *The Golden Age of Islam*, trans. Joan Spencer (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2004 [reprint of first translated edition, 1975]), 146-157. This work was originally published posthumously in 1971 as *Islam dans sa première grandeur.*

[196] Ibid, 147

[197] Ibid, 148

[198] Ibid, 149

[199] Ibid, 151

who was mentioned in Chapter 1 as a friend of Rabi'a's student Sufyan al-Thawri, may have been one of these displaced persons. Also during this period, the local Aramaic-speaking people of Iraq began to show signs of unrest and occasionally rose in revolt. Sometimes, these revolts took on the color of Pre-Islamic Iranian forms of religious revivalism. At other times, they expressed Kharijite or Shiite aspirations. Such forms of popular religious expression led to an increased concern about heresy among religious leaders.

The previously mentioned *Kitab al-zuhd* by al-Mu'afa ibn 'Imran confirms Lombard's picture of economic transformation and social crisis in the early Abbasid period. In contrast with later works of this type, it is almost exclusively devoted to reactionary asceticism. The book opens with a chapter on the advantages of having little wealth and few offspring (*fi fadl qillat al-mal wa al-walad*).[200] Unlike today, where wealth is conceived almost entirely in terms of money, for Mu'afa wealth consisted not only of gold and silver, but also of land, farm animals, women, and slaves. Children, literally "sons," were also included in this list because one's children brought both pride and shame to one's lineage. Furthermore, children required the accumulation of wealth, and hence an involvement with the World, for their upkeep.[201] For Mu'afa, all of the above forms of wealth belonged to the World in the World/Nonworld dichotomy of Islamic asceticism. Mu'afa demonstrates his reactionary approach to asceticism by citing Hadith reports of the Prophet Muhammad that warn against the accumulation of excess wealth.[202] The Caliph 'Umar is said to have wept at the thought of the harm that an increase in wealth would bring to the Muslims.[203] The Prophet's Companion 'Abdallah ibn Mas'ud is quoted as saying there would be a time when people would want to free themselves from the World so much that they would seek out death for themselves.[204] In this and similar accounts, the World is described as a source of strife (*fitna*) that needs to be avoided at all costs. In what is perhaps Mu'afa's harshest condemnation of worldly values, the ascetic Khalid ibn Maymun (d. 753 CE) states that in this age, it is better to raise a dog or a puppy than to raise a child.[205]

The greatest part of Mu'afa's *Kitab al-zuhd* is devoted to the condemnation of fame, status, honor, and the trappings of power. He reports that when the Caliph 'Umar wanted to appoint the ascetic Sa'id ibn 'Amir al-Jumahi (d. 640 CE) governor of Caesaria in Palestine, Jumahi exclaimed, "Fear God, 'Umar, and don't put me in turmoil!" Jumahi's fear of the moral dilemma caused by the exercise of power is presented as a rebuke of those who sought power for personal gain.[206] In a Hadith report that would later be popularized by Ahmad ibn Hanbal and

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[200] Mu'afa's pessimism may be related to the fact that he lost both his wealth and his two sons during the Abbasid conquest of Mosul. See the notice in Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 804.

[201] Muslim ascetics in this period often viewed children as an impediment to the spiritual life because of the necessity to earn a living or otherwise involve oneself with the World in order to care for them. Nusiyya bint Salman, the wife of an ascetic preacher and disciple of Sufyan al-Thawri named Yusuf ibn Asbat al-Shaybani (d. 814-15 CE), complained of her duties as a wife and mother in terms that would be understood by a modern career woman: "Oh Lord, you do not see me as someone worthy of your worship. So because of this you have preoccupied me with a child!" See Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 92.

[202] Mu'afa ibn 'Imran, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 185

[203] Ibid, 179

[204] Ibid, 189

[205] Ibid, 188; this statement probably reflects the conditions that prevailed during the Abbasid revolution, when Mu'afa lost his wealth and his children.

[206] Ibid, 206

other Sunni reformers, Mu'afa quotes the Prophet Muhammad as saying: "Four things remain in my community from the Time of Ignorance (al-Jahiliyya) that people do not want to give up. These are arrogance about social position (al-fakhr fi-l-ahsab), cursing a person for his lineage (al-ta'n fi-l-ansab), using the stars to forecast rain (al-istisqa' bi-l-nujum), and wailing [at funerals] (al-niyaha)."[207] The only way to overcome such problems and return to the original values of Islam, says Mu'afa, is to make the humility of the Prophet the standard of conduct: "He visited the sick; he followed funerals; he answered the petitions of slaves; he rode a donkey; and he allowed his slave to ride with him."[208]

Although Mu'afa does not specifically prescribe fasting, he does advise fostering humility by regulating one's dress and diet. Surprisingly, the overall level of renunciation that he encourages is more moderate than one might expect from such a reactionary work. Far from advocating the kinds of extreme asceticism that one occasionally encounters in Sufi texts, Mu'afa merely warns against overeating, advises moderation in the consumption of meat, and recommends the consumption of barley bread and whole grains instead of wheat bread or white bread. Ironically, such practices today would not be considered asceticism. Rather, they would simply be seen as part of a healthy and organic life-style.

Given the prevalence of reactionary asceticism in the early Abbasid period, it is significant that Rabi'a is not portrayed as a reactionary ascetic in early narratives. However, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, she is sometimes portrayed as an ascetic ritualist (nasika) who performs night-vigils and other acts of self-sacrifice. The accounts about her by Jahiz portray her as an exponent of ethical precaution (wara'). Although most early narratives portray Rabi'a in ways that allow her to be classified among the other women ascetics of her time, early writers do not include her among the Weepers of Basra. Rabi'a the Weeper is a trope that appears to have been first introduced by Ibn al-Jawzi in the late twelfth century CE. In subsequent generations, other writers used Farid al-Din al-'Attar's rather dramatic depiction of Rabi'a as the basis for their own characterizations of her practices.

For Ibn al-Jawzi, Rabi'a's weeping is more an expression of feminine emotionalism than an ascetic virtue. In one account, a male observer states, "I began to hear the sound of Rabi'a's tears falling on [her prayer mat] like pouring rain. Then she became agitated and cried out. At that point, we got up and left."[209] In this statement, one can find three tropological elements that are typical of Ibn al-Jawzi's depiction of Rabi'a. First, she weeps uncontrollably. Second, she becomes agitated. In Sifat al-safwa, Ibn al-Jawzi depicts Rabi'a as reacting to unexpected visitors hysterically, sometimes agitated, sometimes shrieking, and sometimes cringing against a wall. Finally, her male observers, who are made uncomfortable by her actions, take leave of her. Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley have observed that in religions other than Islam as well, male hagiographers felt the need to announce the entry of women onto the public stage with "emotional discourse-breaking acts" such as weeping. Men, on the other hand, are more often characterized by ceremonial behaviors that perpetuate and reconstitute the prevailing social system.[210]

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[207] Ibid, 262; a separate chapter in *Kitab al-zuhd* is devoted to each of these faults.
[208] Ibid, 238-9
[209] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 710-12 and Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 276-83
[210] Patton and Hawley, *Holy Tears*, 13

By contrast, the Rabi'a that Sulami describes a century before Ibn al-Jawzi is a spiritual master much like the men he describes in his biographical dictionary *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*. Sulami's Rabi'a is very different from the highly-strung and emotional recluse portrayed by Ibn al-Jawzi. As we saw in Chapter 1, she is a rational and disciplined teacher who demonstrates her mastery of important states of knowledge. Sulami concentrates on Rabi'a's intellectual abilities more than on her asceticism, portraying her primarily as a teacher of wisdom. Only once does Sulami's Rabi'a lose her self-control: this is when she has become intoxicated by her love for God.[211] By downplaying her emotionalism, Sulami's portrayal of Rabi'a thus provides a more "masculine" image of female spirituality than does Ibn al-Jawzi. Typical of Sulami's depiction of Rabi'a is her tendency to interiorize and essentialize ascetic teachings, such as in the following statement: "For everything there is a fruit (*thamara*) and the fruit of the true knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) is orientation toward God (*iqbal*)."[212] This statement reflects a view of spiritual practice that goes much deeper than either instrumental or reactionary asceticism.

In his book *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, Eliezer Diamond contrasts instrumental asceticism with *essential asceticism*, an asceticism that entails "explicit renunciation of some aspect of conventional existence because self-denial itself is seen as inherently spiritually salutary."[213] The above statement by Rabi'a can be seen as an example of essential asceticism. However, Diamond's definition does not go far enough in elucidating this concept. Rabi'a's essential asceticism was, to use Diamond's terminology, a "dynamic imperative" that caused her to see the ascetic path as governing every aspect of her life.[214] This attitude goes beyond the balance sheet of goal-oriented actions that characterizes instrumental asceticism. For Rabi'a, asceticism was not something supererogatory to Islam; rather, the practice of asceticism was the practice of Islam itself, in the essential Qur'anic sense of a fully engaged submission to God. This is illustrated by a statement by Rabi'a that appears in Kharkushi's *Tahdhib al-Asrar*. When someone asks her how she has attained her spiritual station, she replies, "By leaving aside all that does not concern me and by cleaving to the One who always is" (*bi-tarki ma la ya'nini wa unsi bi-man lam yazal*).[215]

A common theme that emerges from the earliest accounts of Rabi'a's asceticism is her tendency to strip away the outward forms of religious practice and expose the inner essence of ascetic worship in her teachings, sometimes in terms that are shocking to her audience. Often this involved explicit criticism of instrumental forms of asceticism. In Kharkushi's chapter on repentance Rabi'a says, "Our repentance is in need of its own repentance." She also states,

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[211] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 78

[212] Ibid, 76; see also, Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-Asrar*, 49. The person who originally transmitted this statement from Rabi'a was Shayban al-Ra'i (The Shepherd), also called "al-Ubulli" because he resided in al-Ubulla. Shayban was a *Nabati*, one of the original Aramaic-speaking inhabitants of Iraq. See Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-Safwa*, vol. 2, 913-14.

[213] Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 12

[214] Ibid, 11

[215] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-Asrar*, 81; Margaret Smith traces this statement to one of Muhasibi's works, but she does not say which one it is. See idem, *An Early Mystic*, 215. This was probably because this statement, attributed to Rabi'a, can also be found in Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani's chapter on Muhasibi in *Hilyat al-awliya'*. However, a close reading of the passage reveals that the authorial voice is Isfahani's, not Muhasibi's. It is part of an argument to demonstrate that Muhasibi's approach to essential asceticism was shared by other figures of early Sufism, including Rabi'a, 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd, and Dhu al-Nun al-Misri. See Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 10, 108.

"Seeking the forgiveness of God by the tongue alone is the repentance of liars."[216] She explains the meaning of these statements in a third anecdote. A man said to Rabi'a, "Verily, I have committed many sins and acts of disobedience. Do you think that God will redeem me if I repent to him?" "No," Rabi'a replied. "If God had wanted to redeem you, you would already have repented. God the Glorious and Mighty has said, ' [God has already] redeemed them so that they might repent'" (Qur'an, 9:118).[217] In other words, if you were meant to repent, you would have done so already, without need for argument.

Perhaps the clearest example of Rabi'a's critique of instrumental asceticism is in an account from Abu Talib al-Makki's *Qut al-qulub* (The Sustenance of Hearts), which relates one of the lessons that she teaches to Sufyan al-Thawri. Thawri states the problem to be discussed in a formal way, as if he is asking for a *fatwa*: "Every act of worship has a rule behind it and every act of faith has an inner meaning. What is the meaning of your faith?" To this Rabi'a responds, "I do not worship God out of fear of God. If I did, I would be like the disobedient slave-girl who only works when she is afraid. Nor [do I worship God] out of a love for heaven. If I did, I would be like the disobedient slave-girl who only works when she is given something. Instead, I worship God out of love for him alone and out of yearning for him."[218] This statement is important because Rabi'a's concept of worship subordinates the spiritual attitudes of fear (*khawf*) and service (*khidma*), which are central to asceticism, to the attitudes of love (*mahabba*) and knowledge (*ma'rifa*), which would become central to the newly developing tradition of Sufism. In Rabi'a's essential asceticism, the outward forms of worship and divine service that are associated with asceticism are subordinated to their inner meaning. To the extent that the body is transcended through acts of ascetic discipline, the heart as a locus for spiritual knowledge grows in importance.

We shall see in the next chapter that whereas the trope of Rabi'a the Teacher finds its doctrinal basis in the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic, the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic finds its fulfillment in the trope of Rabi'a the Lover. In Chapter 4 we shall see likewise that the trope of Rabi'a the Lover ultimately leads to the trope of Rabi'a the Sufi. In the ladder of spiritual development that begins with asceticism, the servant-devotee of God is transformed into a lover of God, and the lover of God is transformed into a knower of God. This model of spiritual development has been part of the story of Rabi'a from the time of Muhasibi until the present day. It remains an open question whether the coherence of this model is governed by the tropological character of the Rabi'a narrative, or whether the model itself has been shaped by the narratives out of which it is composed.

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[216] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*, 95

[217] Ibid, 97

[218] Muhammad ibn 'Ali b. 'Atiyya Abu Talib al-Makki, *Qut al-qulub fi mu'malat al-Mahbub wa wasf tariq al-murid ila maqam al-tawhid*, edited by Basil 'Uyun al-Sadr (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), vol. 2, 94. This teaching appears to have come originally from the Jewish *Mishnah*, which dates to the fourth century CE. Chapter 1 of *Mishnah Pirkei Avot* (The Wisdom of the Worshippers) contains the following tradition: "Antigonus of Socho received the Torah from Shimon the Righteous. He used to say: Be not like servants who minister unto their master for the sake of receiving a reward, but be like servants who serve their master not upon the condition of receiving a reward; and let the fear of Heaven be upon you." Rabi'a's statement differs from this tradition only in stressing the love of God more than the fear of God as the basis of her asceticism. I would like to thank Gordon Newby of Emory University for this reference.

CHAPTER 3

RABI'A THE LOVER

A long time ago, exchanging greetings and salutations,
the two Sufis met in Basra.

As soon as she saw him behind the gate,
she revealed her face to the beautiful young man.

Her face was wrinkled and her eyes were faded,
beneath the black face-veil and under the white lace.

Hasan bowed his head with a deep sigh, and responded to the salutation of this
dear guest.

"What are you doing Rabi'a, for God's sake?"
The lover asked, his chin trembling. [Rabi'a said,]

"If only 'Hasans' would walk the beautiful streets of Basra,
Oh Allah, how decent human nature would be!

If only people like him walked our streets,
I would never have to wear the veil!"

— Bosnian *Ilahi*, "Hassan i Rabija," by Dzemaludin Latic[1]

I   RABI'A AND THE POETICS OF MYTH

The Rabi'a depicted in this *ilahi* (Islamic religious song) by the Bosnian poet Dzemaludin
Latic never existed as a historical personage. In addition, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya probably never
met al-Hasan al-Basri.[2] If she had done so, Hasan would have been an old man and Rabi'a would
have been a girl of no more than fourteen years of age. It is difficult to imagine even the famous
Rabi'a as a respected teacher at such an early age. Al-Hasan al-Basri died in 728 CE and Rabi'a
died more than 70 years after him, in 801 CE. Thus, from a strictly historical perspective, one
must conclude that this story is a myth and that Rabi'a as she appears in this song is a trope. Just

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[1] Dzemaludin Latic is Professor of Qur'anic Exegesis (*tafsir*) at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo,
Bosnia-Herzegovina. The song was recorded by the popular Bosnian singer Aziz Alili. I am grateful to
Ahmet Alibasic of the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo for translating this *ilahi* and providing
information about its author.
[2] The trope of Rabi'a's friendship with al-Hasan al-Basri first appears in Farid al-Din al-'Attar's (d. 1220
CE) *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* (Memorial of the Saints). Over time, it spread throughout the Islamic world. See
the translated passages on Rabi'a and Hasan from 'Attar in Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi,
Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings* (Mahwah, New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 160-2.

as in the Mandan myth mentioned in the Introduction, the figure of Rabi'a in Latic's *ilahi* is an example of "The Old Woman Who Never Dies."

However, the historical accuracy of the alleged friendship between Hasan and Rabi'a is not important for the Bosnian Muslims who love this *ilahi*, memorize its lyrics, and put it on numerous web sites.[3] What is most important about the song is not its historical accuracy but its message, which alludes to the religious and political troubles that have caused Bosnians to suffer for decades. It recalls a better time when good (*hasan* in Arabic means "good") was easier to find and women did not have to worry about their safety. For fans of this song, Latic's "beautiful streets of Basra" evoke the streets of Sarajevo and other cities of Bosnia in an age of peace when people still trusted each other. Latic uses the figures of Rabi'a and Hasan, who befriend each other through their love of God, to evoke this lost world. As Lynda L. Coon has observed about the stories of Christian saints, Latic's evocation of these two revered figures depends not on facts, but on "*topoi*, literary inventions, and moral imperatives."[4]

The key motif of Latic's *ilahi* is the depiction of Hasan and Rabi'a as lovers of God. By using the trope of Rabi'a the Lover, the song "Hassan i Rabija" is no different from other narratives that use this trope for purposes far beyond what the "real" or historical Rabi'a could ever have imagined. The trope of Rabi'a the Lover has evoked more poetic license than any of the other tropes about her have done. For example, when discussing Rabi'a the Lover in her book *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa* (The Sufi Lover), the Lebanese writer Widad El Sakkakini tells the reader that she keeps a vision of the mythical Rabi'a in her mind's eye. "I see Rabi'a's faint image on the shimmering waves: not in worn-out dress and sandals, with a stick; but moving towards the shores of heaven in a halo of brightness, with a reed pipe, playing the tune for her verses."[5] In *Doorkeeper of the Heart*, a later reflection on Rabi'a that was inspired by the English translation of El Sakkakini's book, Charles Upton offers a similar version of Rabi'a. In his book, however, the poems attributed to Rabi'a are portrayed as precursors of the poetry of the Persian Sufi Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273 CE). "If Rumi is the Ocean, Rabi'a is the Well . . . Rabi'a . . . has the virtues of maidenly simplicity, and the virgin blade; along with the taste of wine, she carries also the taste of water— a far more precious substance, when you live, like Rabi'a did, in the desert of God."[6]

As we can see from these modern representations, the romantic image of Rabi'a the Lover is both complex and contradictory. She lives in the city and in the desert; she is an old woman and a virgin maiden; she walks beside the "shimmering waves" of Basra in a haloed garment and also walks in the "desert of God," playing a reed flute that recalls the opening lines of Rumi's *Masnavi*.[7] As if this were not enough, a recent French representation of Rabi'a,

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[3] See, for example, http://bosnamedia.com/media/cat6.stm.

[4] Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), xv

[5] Widad El Sakkakini, *First among Sufis: the Life and Thought of Rabia al-Adawiyya the Woman Saint of Basra*, trans. Nabil Fatih Safwat (London: The Octagon Press, Ltd., 1982), 62; see also the Arabic text, Widad al-Sakkakini, *al-'Ashiqa al-Mutasawwifa* (The Sufi Lover) (Damascus: Dar Tlas li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Tarjamat wa-l-Nashr, 1989 reprint of 1955 original), 98.

[6] Charles Upton, *Doorkeeper of the Heart: Versions of Rabi'a* (New York: Pir Press, 2003 reprint of 1988 original), vii.

[7] The Introduction of Rumi's *Masnavi* uses the poetic motif of complaint (Ar. *shakwa*) to express the longing of the lover for the beloved. It also expresses the motif of the soul that longs to return to its origin.

Rabi'a: Les Chants de la Recluse (Rabi'a: the Songs of the Recluse) adds the now common but highly dubious claim that she was a reformed prostitute: "Her genius was that of Mary Magdalene. She was much loved."[8]

The trope of Rabi'a the Lover supports Lynda Coon's view of hagiography as a form of "exalted discourse" that fixes the literary representation of a saint in the cultural imaginary.[9] For this reason, more than with the tropes of Rabi'a the Teacher and Rabi'a the Ascetic, the investigation of the trope of Rabi'a the Lover must be more literary than historical. Although there is some evidence that the "real" or historical Rabi'a spoke of love in her teachings, there is no way to know how much her teachings resembled later Sufi love mysticism. The most that we can say with any degree of accuracy is that the trope of Rabi'a the Lover has existed for many centuries and has been, in the words of the French North African writer Jamal-Eddine Benghal, "a point of reference and a model for many men and women taken by purity and love."[10] Therefore, the primary purpose of this chapter cannot be to separate the "real" Rabi'a from her figurative persona, as I have tried to do to in the previous two chapters. Instead, I will concentrate on the representation of Rabi'a the Lover in Sufi literature, focusing on the most important elements in the construction of this trope.

II   ASCETICISM AND LOVE MYSTICISM IN EARLY ISLAMIC BASRA

a.   *From Asceticism to Love Mysticism*

Shaqiq al-Balkhi, a contemporary of Rabi'a whom we encountered in the previous chapters, stated that there are four stages in the path of asceticism. The first stage is renunciation (*zuhd*), the second stage is fear (*khawf*), the third stage is desire for heaven (*al-shawq ila al-janna*), and the fourth stage is love of God (*al-mahabba li-llah*).[11] This teaching is important for several reasons. First, Shaqiq describes asceticism as a path of truthfulness and sincerity (*sidq*). In doing so, he confirms the point made by Vincent Wimbush and Richard Valentasis that the root of asceticism is ethical formation.[12] Second, by saying that asceticism culminates in the love of God, Shaqiq confirms the view of Bishop Kallistos Ware and other religious writers on asceticism that asceticism is an affirmative path of acceptance and not just a negative path of rejection. For Shaqiq, desire motivates the ascetic to attain the ultimate goal of renunciation,

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"Listen to the reed flute how it tells a tale, complaining of separation/ Saying, 'Ever since I was parted from the reed-bed, my lament hath caused man and woman to moan/ I want a bosom torn by severance, that I may unfold the pain of love-desire." Reynold A. Nicholson, editor and translator, *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi* (London: Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1977 [reprint of 1926 original]), vol. 1, 5

[8] Mohammed Oudaimah and Gérard Pfister, *Rabi'a: Les Chants de la Recluse* (Mesnil-sur-l'Estrée, France: Éditions Arfuyen, 2006), 7; as we shall see in Chapter 6, the trope of Rabi'a the Reformed Sinner was the creation of the Egyptian historian and Existentialist philosopher 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi.

[9] Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 1

[10] Jamal-Eddine Benghal, *La Vie de Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, une sainte musulmane du VIIIème siècle* (Paris: Editions Iqra, 2000), 8

[11] Shaqiq al-Balkhi, "Manazil al-Sidq" in Paul Nwyia, *Trois Ouevres inédites de mystiques musulmans, Šaqīq al-Balhī, Ibn 'Atā, Niffarī* (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq, 1972), 17; see also, Balkhi's discussion of the stages of love in Carl W. Ernst, "The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism, from Rabi'a to Ruzbihan," in Lewisohn ed., *Classical Persian Sufism*, 439-41.

[12] Wimbush and Valentasis, "Introduction" in idem, *Asceticism*, xxix

which is union with God. This agrees with an important point that Bishop Ware makes with respect to asceticism in Orthodox Christianity: "Desire, employed aright, impels us to love God; jealousy (or *zelos* [zeal]) spurs us on to make greater efforts in the spiritual life . . . our objective is not the *nekrosis* (mortification) of the passions but their *metathesis* (transposition)."[13] This affirmative view of asceticism is far removed from the negative view made famous by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who claimed that the asceticism of the saints is passive-aggressive and self-indulgent, "a pretext for hibernation, their *novissima gloriae cupido*, their peace in nothingness ('God'), their form of madness."[14]

Shaqiq al-Balkhi also states that the transformation of the ascetic self depends on the conquest of fear, which marks the transition from asceticism as a way of negation to asceticism as a way of affirmation. Freed from preoccupation with the World and its desires and cares, the ascetic opens herself to the life of the Nonworld and seeks the divine presence for her fulfillment. Fulfillment in God is the ultimate goal of the ascetic path. It is also the goal of the mystical path. According to Averil Cameron, by reorienting desire away from the World and toward God, the ascetic expresses "the freest form of desire in his or her individual relation with God."[15] Geoffrey Galt Harpham explains this paradox in the following way: "Asceticism does not exclude desire, it complicates it; it proposes gratifications which are represented as both 'anti-desire' and yet (and for this reason) are more desirable than desire because they do not insult the conscience."[16] For Shaqiq as well, a desire that is "more desirable than desire" inspires the ascetic "to love what God loves and to hate what God hates until nothing becomes more beloved than God and what pleases Him. God watches over and blesses the one who strives for the love of God and bestows Love upon him."[17]

As we saw in Chapter 2, three approaches to Islamic asceticism were current in Rabi'a's time. The first was *instrumental asceticism*, a form of asceticism that was directed toward specific goals. Instrumental asceticism was closely related to the practice of ascetic ritualism (*nusk*), which led the ascetic to conceive of her relationship with God as a balance of religious and moral obligations. God's virtues are always greater than human virtues. Thus, there was theoretically no limit to how much the instrumental ascetic of Rabi'a's day might struggle in her pursuit of ritual and moral perfection. At times, such ascetics even competed with each other in their attempt to attain the highest possible rank in the hierarchy of virtue. The majority of ascetics in Rabi'a's day were instrumental ascetics.

The second type of asceticism in Rabi'a's time was *reactionary asceticism*. This was an expression of protest against the inequality of wealth in the Abbasid Empire. The perspective of reactionary asceticism was illustrated in Chapter 2 by Mu'afa ibn 'Imran's *Kitab al-zuhd*, a book written during Rabi'a's lifetime, which was as much concerned with asceticism as a form of

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[13] Kallistos Ware, "The Way of the Ascetic: Negative or Affirmative?" in Wimbush and Valentasis, *Asceticism*, 12

[14] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Horace B. Samuel (New York: Boni and Liverlight, Inc., 1918), 94

[15] Averil Cameron, "Ascetic Closure and the End of Antiquity," in Wimbush and Valentasis, *Asceticism*, 154

[16] Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative*, 46

[17] Shaqiq al-Balkhi, "Manazil al-Sidq" in Nwyia ed., *Trois Oeuvres inédite*, 20; the verb translated as "strive for" in the above passage is *ibtagha*, which also comes from an Arabic root that connotes "desire."

social protest as it was with asceticism as an approach to God. Reactionary asceticism was not an alternative to instrumental asceticism because it was also instrumental in its approach. This is evident in the following quotation from *Kitab al-zuhd*: "Your wealth calls you to hellfire but your poverty calls you to heaven."[18] In this statement Mu'afa ibn 'Imran rejects wealth as a moral danger but affirms poverty as a sign of worthiness for heaven. The statement is instrumental because salvation depends directly on one's asceticism: wealth leads to disaster but poverty leads to success. This statement also implies that a poor person has an advantage over a rich person in attaining heaven, even if the rich person has led a pious life. Reactionary asceticism represented the sociopolitical aspect of early Islamic asceticism. As such, it was important for those whom Marshall Hodgson called the "Piety-Minded."

What appears to have made Rabi'a distinctive among the ascetics of her day was that she rejected both instrumental asceticism and reactionary asceticism for a third type of asceticism, *essential asceticism*. Essential asceticism was based on the interiorization of ascetic practice. In essential asceticism, one attains the Nonworld not so much by rejecting the World as by detaching oneself from it. The ascetic avoids the World not because it is evil but because it is less important than the Nonworld. In this sense, essential asceticism is part of the normal practice of Islam because it conveys the Qur'anic message of sincere submission to God. Rabi'a's essential asceticism was illustrated in Chapter 2 by her statement that asceticism consists in "leaving aside all that does not concern me and by cleaving to the One that always is."[19] This statement also implies that one of the goals of asceticism is love of God, because the ascetic cleaves to that which is most fundamental for her existence. Since we depend on God for our existence, closeness to God is the worthiest of all goals. Rabi'a is reported to have said, "I do not worship God out of fear of God. If I did, I would be like the disobedient slave-girl who only works when she is afraid. Nor [do I worship God] out of love for heaven. If I did, I would be like the disobedient slave-girl who only works when she is given something. Instead, I worship God out of love for Him alone and out of desire for Him."[20] For Rabi'a, God is the worthiest object of love because He is the source of all things. This confirms Geoffrey Galt Harpham's contention that the ascetic's desire for God is more "desirable than [ordinary] desire." This attitude is also reflected in another saying of Rabi'a: "The best way for the slave to come close to God Most High is for him to know that he must not love anything in this world or the Hereafter other than Him."[21]

b. *Love of God in Qur'an and Hadith*

Mahabba, the Arabic term for love that is used in these quotations of Rabi'a, appears only once in the Qur'an. However, this use is significant, because it occurs in a verse that

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[18] Mu'afa ibn 'Imran, *Kitab al-zuhd*, 185

[19] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*, 81

[20] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 94; see also, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment:* Kitab al-mahabba wa'l-shawq wa-l-uns wa'l-rida, *Book XXXVI of The Revival of the Religious Sciences* Ihya' 'ulim al-din, trans. Eric Ormsby (Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 2011), 52, where the phrase "disobedient slave girl" is rendered euphemistically as "bad worker." Ghazali seems to have taken this quote directly from Makki. Note as well how closely this statement corresponds to the teachings of Shaqiq al-Balkhi discussed above.

[21] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 80-81

instructs the believer to trust completely in God, which is an important aspect of essential asceticism. The term appears as part of a command given by God to the mother of Moses, who is told to put her child in a chest and cast him into the River Nile. God tells her not to worry about the consequences, "for I have put my love upon [Moses] and he will be reared under my care" (*wa alqaytu 'alayka mahabbatan minni wa li-yusna'a 'ala 'ayni*) (Qur'an, 20:39). This verse assures the mother of Moses that her trust in God will be rewarded by God's love and care for her.

Another woman in the Qur'an who entrusts herself completely to God is Mary the Mother of Jesus, who "had faith in the words of her Lord and His books, and was one of the obedient" (Qur'an, 66:12). When the pain of childbirth drove Mary to seek refuge under a palm tree, she cried out to God for help. In response, God provided her with ripe dates and running water to sustain her (Qur'an, 19:23-26). Although the term *mahabba* does not appear in the Qur'anic verses about Mary, the same reciprocity applies to her relationship with God as in the verse about the mother of Moses. The Qur'an's description of Mary as "one of the obedient" (*min al-qanitin*), also connotes devotion and surrender.[22] Mary's devotion to God leads her to entrust her life completely to her Lord, an act that Tor Andrae, the Swedish scholar of Sufism, called "the sum of all devotion."[23] Some Sufis followed Mary's path of entrustment to God (*tawakkul*) and refused to earn a living because, like Mary, they depended on God to provide for all of their needs.[24]

Other verses that mention the love of God in the Qur'an also stress the reciprocity between the believer's love of God and God's love for the believer. "Say: If you love God, follow [the Prophet Muhammad] so that God will love you" (Qur'an, 3:31). "Soon God will bring forth a people whom He will love and they will love Him" (Qur'an, 5:54). A similar sense of reciprocity can also be found in Hadith reports. "When I [i.e., God] love someone, I am the hearing by which he hears, the sight by which he sees, the tongue by which he speaks, and the hand by which he grasps."[25] Ascetic ritualists (*nussak*) used this hadith to argue that the amount of love that God gives to the believer depends on the amount of pious observances that the believer performs. The contrast between love that is given altruistically and without hope of reward and love as a form of recompense for acts of devotion also appears in Hadith. For example, the notion of love as recompense can be seen in the following tradition from the *Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal: "Renounce the World (*izhad fi-l-dunya*) so that God will love you."[26] Despite its mention of love, this hadith is a justification for instrumental asceticism because it depends on a cause-and-effect relation between ascetic practices and divine favor. In contrast, the concept of altruistic love can be seen in the following hadith from the *Sunan* of

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[22] See Aliah Schleiffer, *Mary the Blessed Virgin of Islam* (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1998), 56.

[23] Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, 110

[24] The Iraqi Sufi Ibrahim al-Khawwas (d. 904 CE), who was a famous practitioner of *tawakkul*, even refused to beg for food from others. He said, "It is not part of Sufi conduct to have means upon which to rely in case of need, nor something that can be accepted by another [as payment], nor sight nor tongue with which to beg if one is hungry, nor a word by which to beseech human beings in case of misfortune." See Abu Madyan, *Bidayat al-murid* in V. Cornell, *The Way of Abu Madyan*, 31 and 64.

[25] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Riqaq (Book of Ritual Practices), 38

[26] *Musnad Ibn Hanbal*, Kitab al-Zuhd (Book of Renunciation), 1

Tirmidhi: "God is an intimate friend (*rafiq*) and He loves intimate friendship (*rifq*)."[27] This hadith justifies essential asceticism because God gives love altruistically, irrespective of the believer's ability to respond in kind.

However, one must be careful before using Hadith accounts to define the concept of love in Rabi'a's time. The uncritical use of Hadith may lead the historian of early Islam into the trap of anachronism. The mere fact that a statement appears in a famous collection of Hadith reports does not necessarily mean that the Prophet Muhammad said it. Most of the Hadith collections that exist today were compiled after Rabi'a's time and more than two centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. For example, Ahmad ibn Hanbal died in 855 CE, half a century after Rabi'a and 223 years after the Prophet. Thus, the traditions about love and renunciation in his *Musnad* may reflect current views of asceticism in his own time more than the views of the Prophet. Abu 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, the compiler of *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, died almost a century after Rabi'a, in 892-93 CE. Nearly 260 years separate him from the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, the traditions about altruistic love in his Hadith collection might reflect attitudes about love that were current in the culture of the Abbasid age but not in the age of either Rabi'a or the Prophet.

Nevertheless, Hadith collections can still be used to suggest answers to more limited questions. For example, one can use them to get a sense of whether the terms for love used in later Sufi reports about Rabi'a were authentic to Rabi'a's era. To take but one example, a survey of statements about the love of God in Hadith accounts reveals that the word *mahabba* often appears as a generic term for love.[28] In one hadith, the Prophet explains that the Qur'anic term "ties of the womb" (*silat al-rahim*, Qur'an, 4:1) means, "love for one's family" (*mahabbatan fi-l-ahl*).[29] Here, the term *mahabba* appears as a synonym for *hubb*, the most common word for love in Arabic. The Prophet could easily have used the phrase *hubban fi-l-ahl* instead of *mahabbatan fi-l-ahl*.

Support for the idea that early Muslims used the terms *mahabba* and *hubb* interchangeably can be found in a statement by Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 776 or 790 CE). "Do not seek the love of God (*hubb Allah*) along with the love of money or honor (*mahabbat al-mal wa-l-sharaf*)."[30] This statement is significant because it reverses the expected use of the terms *hubb* and *mahabba*. In later generations, Sufis would use the term *mahabba* for the love of God but not for the love of worldly things. However, in Ibn Adham's statement, these terms are reversed, such that *mahabba* stands for love of the World but *hubb* stands for love of God. Accounts such as these indicate that the terms *hubb* and *mahabba* were synonymous in Rabi'a's time. Thus, there is evidence to conclude that the term *mahabba* was a common word for love in early Islam, and that ascetics and Proto-Sufis used it to replace the more generic word *hubb* as a term for the love of God. This hypothesis is confirmed by Sufi traditions in Arab regions of the Muslim world, where *mahabba* is still used as the primary term for the love of God.

However, this situation does not appear to have been the case for *'ishq*. This term, which means "passionate desire," has been used by Sufis after the time of Rabi'a as a replacement for

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[27] *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al-Birr (Book of Virtue), 77

[28] This is also the opinion of Jahiz, who was one of the first to introduce the figure of Rabi'a in Arabic literature. See Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1979), 36.

[29] *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al-Birr, 49 and *Musnad Ibn Hanbal*, 2:374

[30] Sulami, *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*, 35

mahabba.[31] Unlike *mahabba*, the term *'ishq* cannot be found in any of the major Hadith collections. Only its root, *'ashiqa*, appears in Hadith, and then only once. This is in the *Musnad* of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, where the verb *'ashiqa* refers to physical desire, such as a man's desire for a woman.[32] Louis Massignon claimed that the first person to use the term *'ishq* for the love of God was 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd (d. 793 CE), who is said to have been an associate of Rabi'a in Basra.[33] According to Massignon, Ibn Zayd refused to use the term *mahabba* because it "presumed too much confidence in divine favor."[34] This opinion was challenged by the Egyptian scholar 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, who notes that Massignon cites no evidence for his assertion.[35] According to Badawi, the term *'ishq* did not become part of Sufi vocabulary until a generation or so after Rabi'a in the ninth century CE, and reflects a later stage in the development of Sufi love mysticism.

Thus, unlike the case for *mahabba*, the evidence provided by Hadith suggests that the use of *'ishq* as a term for the love of God was probably a later innovation. This would suggest that statements attributed to Rabi'a using the term *'ishq* are probably not authentic.[36] In support of this assertion, one can also add that the basic meanings of *'ishq* and *mahabba* in Arabic are different. The term *'ishq* connotes love as desire whereas the term *mahabba*, like the term *hubb*, connotes love as affection.[37] One could argue, *pace* Massignon, that love-as-affection (*mahabba*) is a more appropriate way of expressing a Muslim ascetic's love for God than love-as-passionate-desire (*'ishq*). Where, then, did the Sufi term *'ishq* as "desire for God," come from? Can one find a precedent for "desire" as connoting love in general? We shall see later in this chapter that a possible source for this meaning was the Greek term *eros*, which, like *'ishq*, meant both "love" and "desire."

c. *The Ascetic Love Mystics of Basra*

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[31] For the Abbasid-era writer Jahiz, *'ishq* was a type of *mahabba*. See Bell, *Love Theory*, 36. On *'ishq* as excessive or mad love see Dols, *Majnun*, 313-19.

[32] *Musnad Ibn Hanbal*, 5:164

[33] In some Sufi texts, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd, and Riyah (or Rabah) al-Qaysi (d. 796 CE) appear as members of a Basra Sufi Love Trio. In this trope, Rabi'a is depicted as the founder of the doctrine of *mahabba*, Riyah al-Qaysi is the founder of *khulla* (intimate friendship), and Ibn Zayd is the founder of the doctrine of *'ishq*. See my discussion of this trope in Rkia Elaroui Cornell, "Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyyah (circa 720-801)," in Cooperson and Toorawa, *Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, 294.

[34] Massignon, *Essay*, 135

[35] In Ibid, 135, n. 346, Massignon cites a manuscript by the Hanbali theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE), as the source for this claim about Ibn Zayd. However, he does not give the title. See also, Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 61-63.

[36] Further support for this hypothesis can be found in the fact that theoretical works on love-as-*'ishq* in Islam are not common until the mid-tenth century CE. An example of such works is the "Epistle on the Essence of Love" (*Risalat mahiyyat al-'ishq*), the thirty-seventh epistle (*risala*) of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwan al-Safa'*). For a discussion of this work see Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of Al-Ghazali and Al-Dabbagh* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 18-21.

[37] In *'Atf al-alif al-ma'luf 'ala al-lam al-ma'tuf* (The Conjunction of the Attached Letters *Alif* and *Lam*), Abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Daylami (d. ca. 1001-2 CE) defines love (*hubb*) as "a name for affection that is pure." See Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Daylami, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, trans. Joseph Norment Bell and Hassan Mahmood Abdul Latif Al Shafie (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 24.

As we saw in Chapter 2, Walter O. Kaelber defines asceticism as "a voluntary, sustained, and at least partially systematic program of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensual or profane gratifications are renounced in order to attain a higher spiritual state or a more thorough absorption in the sacred." Both goals of asceticism, the attainment of a higher spiritual state and a more thorough absorption in the sacred, are part of the essential asceticism practiced by Rabi'a and the Sufis who followed her. Asceticism and mysticism come together at the point where the goals of both paths are attained: in the "thorough absorption" in God that is the goal of essential asceticism.

In the book *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*, Margaret Smith locates the meeting-point between asceticism and mysticism in the notion that "none can attain direct knowledge of God except by purification from self. The soul must be stripped of the veils of selfishness and sensuality if it is to see clearly the Divine Vision."[38] Recent comparative studies of asceticism have confirmed Smith's hypothesis. It seems that the object of asceticism in all major religions is to purify the self in order to attain a higher reality.[39] In Islamic asceticism, purification of the self is the purpose of *zuhd* (renunciation) and *wara'* (ethical precaution). However, as we have seen, asceticism as a form of active spirituality involves both a withdrawal from the World and an approach to God beyond the World.

The most basic approach to God for early Muslim ascetics was through instrumental asceticism and ascetic ritualism (*nusk*). Through ritualized acts of devotion, early Muslim ascetics sought to make themselves more worthy of God. However, a better means of approach to God was the essential asceticism associated with Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. For Margaret Smith, Love is the "guide and inspiration of the soul" that motivates the ascetic's approach to God. "He that does not love does not know God; for God is Love," Smith says, quoting the New Testament (I John 4:8). "The Oriental mystic, seeking to get rid of that element of not-being, which is opposed to true Being, the Divine Reality, finds that self, the great hindrance, can be overcome by Love alone. Love alone can perfectly purify the soul and set it free from the bonds of self-seeking and the fetters of the flesh and so enable it to pass on its upward way, to look upon God as He is in truth, and to realize that it is itself one with the Divine Goodness, one with that Reality which is also Everlasting Love."[40]

The type of transcendent love-mysticism that Smith describes in the above quotation has been a hallmark of Sufism since the time of Rabi'a. This has led many Sufis and modern scholars to assert that Rabi'a was important— perhaps even the key figure— in introducing the concept of Love in Islam and defining *mahabba* as transcendent or mystical love.[41] One can find historical

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[38] Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism*, 5. This work, which is largely unknown today, first appeared in 1931, three years after *Rabi'a the Mystic*. It remains the best available comparative study of early Christian and Islamic mysticism in the Middle East.

[39] Although Smith locates the meeting-point of asceticism and mysticism in the purification of the self that leads to the vision of God, she maintains the mistaken view that both asceticism and mysticism are passive forms of spirituality. In *Rabi'a the Mystic* (1928), Smith contends that early Sufism "consisted of asceticism carried to the point of quietism." See Smith, *Rabi'a* (Rainbow Bridge), 76 and (Oneworld), 100.

[40] Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism*, 5-6. In this passage, the phrase, "Oriental mystics" refers to Muslims and Eastern Christians alike.

[41] 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi (*Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 63) claims that no Muslim used the term *mahabba* for divine love before Rabi'a. Although Sulami's Book of Sufi Women refutes this claim, there is reason to believe that the love of God and essential asceticism ascribed to Rabi'a provided the framework for

support for this assertion in the observation that a transcendent form of love mysticism does not seem to be prominent among Muslim ascetics before Rabi'a. For example, although several women ascetics in Sulami's Book of Sufi Women teach a path of transcendence through love of God, most of them were Rabi'a's students or flourished after her time. However, although Rabi'a may have been an important figure in the development of Islamic love mysticism, she was not the first person to teach the love of God in Basra. This distinction appears to belong instead to an early male ascetic, 'Amir ibn 'Abd Qays (d. ca. 680 CE).

According to the Egyptian historian Su'ad 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, 'Amir was "the first lover of God (*muhibb*) in Islam."[42] Even more, the clan of Banu 'Abd Qays in Basra may also have been associated with the concept of *mahabba*. For example, Sulami's Book of Sufi Women mentions a woman named 'Afiya of 'Abd Qays, who was known as "The Infatuated" (*al-Mushtaqa*) because she combined both the love of God (*mahabba*) and desire for God (*shawq*) in her teachings. Sulami quotes 'Afiya as saying, "The lover (*muhibb*) never wearies of intimate discourse (*munajat*) with the Beloved, and nothing is of interest to him other than the Beloved. Oh, may I always desire Him!"[43] If Sulami had not specified that this statement came from a woman of 'Abd Qays, one might have thought that it had come from Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Apparently, the clan of Banu 'Abd Qays passed down a tradition of ascetic love starting with 'Amir ibn 'Abd Qays, just as Rabi'a's clan of Banu 'Adi ibn Qays passed down a tradition of renunciation starting with Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya and her husband Sila ibn Ushaym.[44] Both 'Adi ibn Qays and the clan of 'Abd Qays were part of the same tribe of Qays 'Aylan. For this reason, one might suggest that Rabi'a's practices of asceticism and divine love were part of the repertoire of this tribe's traditions: they were, so to speak, "all in the family."

However, one should not overlook an important difference between the Love doctrine of 'Amir ibn 'Abd Qays and that of his later kinswoman 'Afiya. For 'Amir, the love of God does not seem to have led to a transcendent knowledge of God. Instead, 'Amir's love of God appears to have been instrumental. In *Hilyat al-awliya'*, Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani quotes 'Amir as saying, "I love God, the Glorious and Mighty, with a love that eases every problem for me and God has shown his pleasure with me by granting my every wish."[45] This statement describes the love of an instrumental ascetic, for which each investment of devotion or service to God is in expectation of a tangible reward. By contrast, 'Afiya's passionate desire for God, which causes her to see nothing in the world except the Divine Beloved, recalls the essential asceticism made famous by Rabi'a. A change seems to have taken place in the doctrine of the love of God in Basra during Rabi'a's lifetime.

A survey of the statements of early ascetics in Basra suggests that the concept of essential asceticism began to appear in Basra around the second half of the eighth century CE. In this period, one can also find examples of both instrumental and transitional approaches to the love of

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subsequent theories of love mysticism in Islam. The idea that Rabi'a was the first love mystic in Islam goes back in modern studies to Margaret Smith's *Rabi'a the Mystic*. For a later version of this trope, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 4.

[42] 'Abd al-Raziq, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, 117

[43] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 98-9; note that this quotation uses *shawq*, the generic term for "desire" in Arabic, rather than the later term *'ishq*.

[44] See the discussions of Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya in Chapters 1 and 2 above.

[45] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 2, 89

God. For example, Abu Muhammad Habib al-Farisi, better known as Habib al-'Ajami (both terms refer to his Persian origin), frequented Basra around the time of the Abbasid conquest in 750 CE. According to Isfahani, he was famous for "ransoming his soul from God" (*ishtara nafsahu min Allah*) through acts of devotion.[46] It was so widely believed that Habib's bargains with God would be fulfilled that people gave him money to distribute as alms as a down payment on their dwellings in paradise.[47] Ransoming one's soul from God and putting down payments on dwellings in paradise are unmistakable expressions of instrumental asceticism.

In partial contrast to Habib al-'Ajami's instrumental asceticism was the approach of Malik ibn Dinar (d. 745 CE). Ibn Dinar was a student of al-Hasan al-Basri who served as an important link between the ascetics of Hasan's and Rabi'a's generations. Some hagiographers even claim that Ibn Dinar and Rabi'a knew each other.[48] The goal of Ibn Dinar's asceticism was to attain complete acceptance of whatever God willed. He would say, "Verily the heart of the lover of God loves hardships for God's sake."[49] Unlike Habib al-'Ajami and 'Amir of 'Abd Qays but more like Rabi'a and 'Afiya of 'Abd Qays, Ibn Dinar viewed his altruistic love of God as a reflection of God's own altruism. This can be seen in the following statement: "I read in some book that God the Glorious and Mighty said, 'Oh son of Adam, my goodness descends on you and your evil rises up to me. I show my love to you by granting you grace (*ni'ma*) but you show your dislike of me through your disobedience. Yet I am still a generous king who turns aside his face from your ugly behavior.'"[50] However, although Malik ibn Dinar viewed his love for God altruistically, he still did not conceive of divine love as a form of intimacy between lover and beloved. Rather, it was an expression of the affection of a grateful client for an all-forgiving patron. As such, it still fell short of true love mysticism.

By contrast, the love of God expressed by Rabi'a and other female ascetics of the Basra region made greater use of the notion of intimacy. The earliest recorded saying by Rabi'a, which appears in a work by the early Sufi al-Harith al-Muhasibi, speaks of the relationship between God and the ascetic in terms that are much more intimate than those used by Ibn Dinar: "The night has come, the darkness has mingled, and every lover is left alone with his beloved. Now I am alone with you, my Beloved."[51] Besides Rabi'a, several other contemporary women ascetics of the Basra region also combined essential asceticism with the intimate love of God. Among the most notable of these were three women of al-Ubulla, whom we have already met in Chapter 2. These were Rayhana, Hayyuna, and Sha'wana, who lived more or less at the same time as Rabi'a. Rayhana was a black slave.[52] However, despite her lowly status, she was famous as a poet. Sulami's section on Rayhana in his Book of Sufi Women contains the following verses that express her intimate love of God:

> You are my intimate companion, my aspiration, and my happiness,

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[46] Ibid, vol. 6, 149

[47] Ibid, 151

[48] See, for example, the account related by Malik ibn Dinar in 'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-Awliya'* reproduced in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 167-8.

[49] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 6, 263

[50] Ibid, 277

[51] Muhasibi, *al-Qasd wa al-ruju' ila Allah*, 104

[52] Nisaburi, *'Uqala' al-majanin*, 147

And my heart refuses to love anything but you.

Oh my dear, my aspiration, and the object of my desire (*muradi*),
My desire (*shawqi*) is endless! When will I finally encounter you?

My request is not for Heaven's pleasures (*min al-jinani na'ima*);
I only want to be together with you![53]

The depiction of Rayhana in hagiographic literature is important for the Rabi'a myth because she embodies two characteristics that would appear in later narratives about Rabi'a. First, she was a slave, an attribution that first appears in Nisaburi's eleventh-century work, *'Uqala' al-majanin*. Two centuries later, the same attribution would be made about Rabi'a by Farid al-Din al-'Attar and it remains a major part of the Rabi'a myth today. Second, Rayhana is described by both Nisaburi and Sulami as a poet of love mysticism. As we shall see below, this too is an important part of the Rabi'a myth. The trope of Rabi'a the Love Poet first appears in Abu Talib al-Makki's *Qut al-qulub*, which was written about a generation before *'Uqala' al-majanin*. Might the tropes of Rabi'a the Slave and Rabi'a the Love Poet have been conflated with similar tropes of Rayhana? This possibility is worth considering, although, as we shall see, there is also evidence to support a different hypothesis.

What is most significant about Rayhana's poem in the present context is that it expresses a "desire more desirable than desire," which Geoffrey Galt Harpham has described as the hallmark of the essential ascetic's approach to God. In this poem, Rayhana rejects the pleasures of heaven for an intimate encounter with God for its own sake. She also expresses a similar sentiment in a statement reproduced by Ibn al-Jawzi in *Sifat al-safwa*: "The lover (*muhibb*) subsists with the object of his hopes (*al-ma'mul*) with a presence that causes the heart to take flight because of happiness."[54] Such expressions of love without expectation of reward indicate that Rayhana was an exponent of essential asceticism. In another poem from Nisaburi's *'Uqala' al-majanin*, she describes her intimate relationship with God in terms of self-sacrifice and martyrdom

It is enough for the lover that the Beloved knows
That the lover is cast down (*matruh*) at his door.

The heart within him breathes in the darkness of night,
Pierced through and wounded by the arrows of passion (*hawa*).[55]

This is the kind of love for which Rabi'a was to become famous, a love so single-minded that the lover is willing to make any sacrifice in order to be with the Beloved. Even though Rayhana is mortally wounded by passion, she remains at the Beloved's door, taking her last breaths in hope of attaining union.

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[53] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 94-95; I have changed the translation of this poem slightly from the original version.
[54] Ibn al-Jawzi Appendix in Ibid, 306-7; I have changed the translation of this verse somewhat from the original version.
[55] Nisaburi, *'Uqala' al-majanin*, 147

In a famous anecdote, which first appears about a century and a half after her death, someone asks Rabi'a, "How is your love for the Prophet?" Rabi'a replies, "Verily, I love him. However, my love for the Creator has preoccupied me from love for created things" (*shaghalani hubb al-khaliq 'an hubb al-makhluq*).[56] This statement is open to many different interpretations. One is that Rabi'a's intense love for God has caused her to overlook the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad in Hadith in favor of the teachings of the Divine Beloved in the Qur'an. The early Sufi biographer Abu Sa'id ibn al-A'rabi (d. 952-53 CE), who may have been the first to transmit this saying, explains Rabi'a's words in the following way. "What she meant was this: I love the Messenger of God with faith, belief, and conviction, because he is the Messenger of God and because God loves him and has commanded us to love him. But my love for God demands preoccupation with constant remembrance of God, intimate converse with him, and constant delight in the sweetness of his speech and in his looking into men's hearts, while still remembering his blessings."[57] Because of the implication that the words of God are more important than the words of the Prophet, this and similar statements led Rabi'a to be accused of heresy by some opponents of Sufism. Ironically, one of her champions who defended her against such accusations was the Hanbali jurist Ibn Taymiyya, who was bitterly opposed to Sufism.[58]

Another woman ascetic of al-Ubulla who appears to have taught love mysticism was Hayyuna. As noted previously, Hayyuna is the only figure to appear in premodern sources as a teacher of Rabi'a. She also appears in some sources as the teacher of Rayhana. A major source of information about Hayyuna was the early ascetic and proto-Sufi Ibrahim ibn Adham.[59] This detail suggests that Hayyuna flourished in the mid-eighth century CE. Might Hayyuna have been the original source of the doctrine of love mysticism for which Rabi'a has been given credit? We will probably never know the answer to this question. However, a comparison of Hayyuna's statements with the statement of Rabi'a reproduced by Muhasibi is very suggestive of this possibility: "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya would say at the coming of night, 'Night has come, the darkness has mingled (*ikhtalata al-zalam*), and every lover is left alone with his beloved. Now I am alone with you, my Beloved.'"[60]

This statement is similar in form to statements about love mysticism attributed to Hayyuna in Nisaburi's *'Uqala' al-majanin*. In the longest quotation cited by Nisaburi, Hayyuna gives an analysis of the states of love (*ahwal al-mahabba*), which seems to indicate that she had a well-developed doctrine of love mysticism:

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[56] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 78-9; a slightly earlier version of this statement can be found in Daylami's *'Atf al-alif*. See Daylami, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, 112. Daylami appears to have taken the quotation from Abu Sa'id ibn al-A'rabi's *Tabaqat al-nussak*. On this latter work, see Chapter 1 and R. Cornell, Introduction to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 53.

[57] Daylami, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, 112

[58] The story that most concerned Ibn Taymiyya has Rabi'a saying about the Ka'ba in Mecca, "This is nothing but an idol to be worshipped on the earth; it has no part of God in it, yet at the same time it is not empty of Him." Although Ibn Taymiyya denies that Rabi'a ever made this statement, he nonetheless defends its theological premise. See Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu'a al-Rasa'il wa al-masa'il*, edited by Muhammad 'Ali Baydun (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), vol. 1, 76 and 94-7.

[59] See, for example, the account attributed to Ibn Adham in Nisaburi, *'Uqala' al-majanin*, 150.

[60] Muhasibi, *al-Qasd wa-l-ruju' ila Allah*, 104

One who loves [God] becomes intimate (*man ahabba anisa*). One who is intimate [with God] becomes joyful (*man anisa tariba*). One who is joyful becomes desirous (*man anisa ishtaqa*). One who is desirous becomes infatuated (*man ishtaqa waliha*). One who is infatuated serves [the Beloved] (*man waliha khadima*). One who serves [the Beloved] attains nearness (*man khadima wasala*). One who attains nearness attains union (*man wasala ittasala*). One who attains union gains intimate knowledge (*man ittasala 'arafa*). One who has intimate knowledge attains proximity [with the Beloved] (*man 'arafa qaruba*). One who is in a state of proximity cannot sleep and experiences moments of profound sadness (*wa tasawwarat 'alayhi bawariq al-ahzan*).[61]

Other statements by Hayyuna are similar in form to the statement by Rabi'a reported by Muhasibi. In one of these, Hayyuna makes the following supplication: "Oh God! Grant me peace in my heart through my vow (*'aqd*) to trust only in you. Make all of my thoughts, ideas, and inclinations agree with your acceptance of me. Do not allow these to deprive me of you. Oh, hope of those who hope!"[62] Like Rayhana and Rabi'a, Hayyuna is depicted as composing poetry. However, all that remains of her poetry are scattered verses, such as the following: "Oh one who has promised satisfaction to the Beloved! You and none other are the one that I want!"[63] In another verse, Hayyuna admonishes God for her passionate suffering: "You know that I am infatuated with you. So, my Lord, why don't you protect me from the harshness of the sun?"[64]

Another important similarity between Hayyuna and Rabi'a is in her role as a teacher-trainer (*mu'addiba*). Hayyuna was famous for giving "tough love" to her students and associates, just as Rabi'a supposedly did with Sufyan al-Thawri. In an account from *'Uqala' al-majanin*, Hayyuna kicks Rabi'a awake before dawn, saying, "Get up! The wedding of the Guided Ones (*'urs al-muhtadin*) has come! Oh, one who beautifies the Brides of the Night (*'ara'is al-layl*) by means of night-vigils!"[65] The metaphor of "Brides of the Night" is reminiscent of Rabi'a's statement reported by Muhasibi. In another account from *'Uqala' al-majanin*, Hayyuna is depicted as criticizing a famous male ascetic. Much as Rabi'a is depicted as chastising the jurist Sufyan al-Thawri for his worldliness, Hayyuna is depicted as chastising the preacher and ascetic 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd for his hypocrisy.

One day Hayyuna was present at one of 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd's sessions. Upon hearing him finish speaking, she stood up and shouted, "Oh so-called theologian (*mutakallim*)! Talk about yourself instead! By God, if you were to die, I would not attend your funeral!" "Why?" Ibn Zayd asked. She replied, "You talk about people and then you seek their company. I can only compare you to a child in the first stages of learning. His way of learning is to memorize things in his mother's house in the evening such that he would forget them completely by daybreak. This causes his teacher to discipline him by hitting him. So go, 'Abd al-Wahid! Chastise yourself with an abundance of discipline (*adab*). Sustain yourself with the nourishment of sufficiency in God, and earn your true reputation by applying to yourself what you say about other people!"[66]

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[61] Ibid

[62] Ibid

[63] Ibid, 149

[64] Ibid

[65] Ibid; See Chapter 2 n. 198 above for other examples of this trope.

[66] Nisaburi, *'Uqala' al-majanin*, 149-150

The final woman ascetic of al-Ubulla in Rabi'a's time to be associated with love mysticism was Sha'wana. The figure of Sha'wana the Lover appears in a single account attributed to the Persian Sufi Muhammad ibn Khafif of Shiraz (d. 982 CE). As we saw in Chapter 2, Sha'wana is most famous as a practitioner of ascetic weeping. In Ibn Khafif's story, she weeps at having neglected her devotions "because she remained so long distraught by love." Later, a figure appears to her in a dream and says to her in verse:

> Let your eyes flow with the tears you were holding back,
> For lamentations can cure the grief-stricken.
>
> Be diligent; keep vigils, and fast always and forever,
> For wasting away is a characteristic of the obedient.[67]

Ibn Khafif's account is significant because it recalls Herbert W. Basser's observation that in rabbinic Judaism penitential tears were regarded as a means of arousing divine passion. If the same could be said for the tears of Muslim ascetics, then Sha'wana's example allows us to link ascetic weeping to both essential asceticism and love mysticism. According to this view, weeping, like other expressions of asceticism, helps the ascetic cross the boundary between the World and the Nonworld. Basser explains, "The mystery of crying is that through tears the outside worlds and the interior worlds merge deep inside the human spirit."[68] As we have seen in Walter O. Kaelber's definition of asceticism cited above, this "merging of outside and interior worlds" is a major goal of both asceticism and mysticism.

d. The Question of Rabi'a's Celibacy

Most premodern Muslim sources describe Rabi'a as celibate. In her chapter on Rabi'a's celibacy in *Rabi'a the Mystic*, Margaret Smith cites several sources for this claim and notes that Rabi'a was reputed to have refused proposals of marriage from 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd, the Abbasid governor of Basra, and even from al-Hasan al-Basri, who died over 70 years before her.[69] For Smith, Rabi'a's celibacy suggested parallels with Christianity. "Like her Christian sisters in the life of sanctity," she remarks, "Rabi'a espoused a heavenly bridegroom and turned her back on earthly marriage even with one of her own intimates and companions on the Way."[70] As a Christian scholar, Smith believed that Rabi'a's celibacy was based on the Christian model of marriage to God. This opinion was objectionable for some Muslim writers, who sought to distance Rabi'a from Christianity. For example, Widad El Sakkakini counters Smith's view by stating, "Rabi'a's love was not like the love known to the Greeks, which came from the teachings of Plato; nor like the pre-Islamic love familiar to the monks. Her uniquely woven model entered the Islamic creeds as a concept of beauty dissociated from the body."[71]

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[67] Daylami, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, 199

[68] Basser, "A Love for all Seasons," 185

[69] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 29-39 and *Rabi'a* (Rainbow Bridge), 10-19

[70] Ibid (Oneworld), 32 and (Rainbow Bridge), 13

[71] El Sakkakini, *First among Sufis*, 62; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 98

Su'ad 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq's attempt to disassociate Rabi'a from Christian models of celibacy went even further. According to 'Abd al-Raziq, Rabi'a started her adult life as a married woman and only later turned to celibacy after her husband had died: "She did not practice celibacy like Christian nuns. Rather, the actual sources state that she was married and that every night she used to cook and attend to her husband, saying, 'Do you have a need?' When she had fulfilled them and left him, she would purify herself and bend her knees in prayer."[72] The original version of this story comes from Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa*, but the woman in question is not Rabi'a. Instead, she is the wife of Riyah (or Rabah) al-Qaysi (d. 796 CE).[73] In some modern versions of Rabi'a's life, Rabi'a is depicted as the wife of Riyah al-Qaysi.

'Abd al-Raziq's attempt to refute the accounts of Rabi'a's celibacy can be criticized on several grounds. First, her argument against Christian comparisons ignores a long-standing tradition in Sufism that refers to the mystic's intimate encounter with God as a form of spiritual marriage.[74] This can be seen, for example, in Hayyuna's references to God's devotees as "Brides of the Night" (*'ara'is al-layl*) and the ascetic's night vigil as the "Wedding of the Guided Ones" (*'urs al-muhtadin*). Even today, the death-date of a Sufi saint in many parts of the Muslim world is referred to as a "wedding" (*'urs*). On such evidence, Margaret Smith was justified in suggesting a parallel between the Christian concept of celibacy as marriage to God and the Sufi notion of union with God as a form of spiritual marriage.

Ironically, 'Abd al-Raziq's contention that Rabi'a became celibate after her husband had died makes her celibacy seem even more "Christian" than otherwise. Although Muslim widows may become celibate after the death of their husbands, this is not a widely recommended practice in Islam. Rather, it is more typically Christian. For example, Paul of Tarsus states in his letter to Timothy that Christian widows should take a vow of celibacy after the death of their husbands (1 Tim. 5:9-12). Thus, 'Abd al-Raziq's attempt to avoid comparisons with Christianity by making Rabi'a a celibate widow had the opposite effect of what she intended. In religious terms, this practice is more "Christian" than "Muslim."

Finally, 'Abd al-Raziq cites only two premodern sources to back up her claim of Rabi'a's widowhood. Both of these sources are chronologically later than the sources that assert Rabi'a's celibacy and both come from Egypt. The earlier of these sources is *al-Rawd al-fa'iq* (The Garden of Awareness) by Shu'ayb ibn Sa'd al-Hurayfish (d. 1398 CE). In this account, al-Hasan al-Basri comes to visit Rabi'a after her husband dies and inquires whether she wants to marry again.[75] We

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[72] 'Abd al-Raziq, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, 57

[73] See Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*

[74] The trope of the marriage of the human soul to God goes back to the Jewish Hellenistic philosopher Philo of Alexandria (d. 45 CE). It was picked up from Philo's followers by early Christians in Alexandria and most likely entered Islamic writings through the influence of Nestorian Christian teachers in Iraq, who followed the traditions of both Alexandrian philosophy and Alexandrian Christianity. See Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*, translated by Michael Chase with Introduction by Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 55 and n. 12.

[75] Al-Shaykh ['Abdullah Shu'ayb ibn Sa'd] al-Hurayfish, *al-Rawd al-fa'iq fi-l-mawa'iz wa-l-raqa'iq* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Jumhuriyya al-'Arabiyya, 1970), 183; In tracing the original version of this account to 'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, Margaret Smith incorrectly translates the text as stating that Hasan says to Rabi'a, "I desire that we should marry and be betrothed." (*Rabi'a* [Oneworld], 31 and [Rainbow Bridge], 13) However, in the original Persian passage from 'Attar, Hasan asks, "Do you desire to take a husband?" (Pers. *Raghibti shawhar koni?*) In neither of the passages in 'Attar where Hasan mentions marriage to Rabi'a, does he identify himself as a possible suitor. See Shaykh Farid al-Din Muhammad 'Attar

can reject this account as anachronistic because Hasan died long before Rabi'a. The source of most of Hurayfish's accounts about Rabi'a was 'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* (Memorial of the Saints), which was written around the beginning of the thirteenth century CE.[76] However, he also added other elements to the Rabi'a narratives, such as the claim of her marriage, which cannot be found in 'Attar's work. The second source that 'Abd al-Raziq cites to prove Rabi'a's marriage and widowhood is *al-Kawakib al-durriyya* (The Pearly Spheres), by Muhammad 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Munawi (d. 1621 CE).[77] This collection of Sufi biographies from Ottoman Egypt is notorious for its inaccuracies, such as the assertion that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was both from Basra and Egypt.[78] Clearly, if these are the best that 'Abd al-Raziq can provide in the way of "actual" historical sources, then her assertion that Rabi'a was a widow rests on very shaky ground.

Accounts of Rabi'a's celibacy are both more numerous and chronologically earlier than are accounts of her marriage and widowhood. The earliest account of Rabi'a's celibacy can be found in *Balaghat al-nisa'* by Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur (d. 893 CE). As we saw in Chapter 1, this work is one of the earliest to mention Rabi'a. Like his predecessors Muhasibi and Jahiz, Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur reproduced local accounts about Rabi'a from Basra. In the account in question, Rabi'a is asked, "Marriage is a requirement of God, the Glorious and Mighty. So why do you not marry?" She replies: "One requirement of God prevents me from fulfilling another of His requirements."[79] This account is also significant because it associates Rabi'a's celibacy with essential asceticism; in fact, it is also the earliest evidence of her essential asceticism. Because it is an early source of non-Sufi origin, Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's claim that Rabi'a practiced celibacy is much more credible than the late Egyptian anecdotes denying her celibacy that are cited by 'Abd al-Raziq. Furthermore, since the majority of other premodern sources agree that Rabi'a was celibate, this early account in *Balaghat al-nisa'* should be taken as important evidence that the "real" Rabi'a was in fact, to borrow a term from Susanna Elm, a "virgin of God."[80]

At the opposite end of the spectrum from 'Abd al-Raziq's assertion that Rabi'a was married, is the claim of another Egyptian historian, Taha 'Abd al-Baqi Surur, that Rabi'a's celibacy was the result of her radical other-worldliness. "[Rabi'a] had left creation in its entirety. She had left the world in its entirety. She was spirit and not body. So what could men want of her?"[81] Surur's rhetorical question raises the issue of how the celibacy of Muslim women ascetics was perceived in Rabi'a's time. Was it similar to the Christian notion of marriage or betrothal to God as imagined by Margaret Smith, or was it an expression of extreme other-worldliness, as Surur seems to suggest?

In answering this question, one must first take note of the fact that the Qur'an appears to criticize monasticism (*rahbaniyya*)— and by implication celibacy— when it states that the

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Nishaburi, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, ed. Muhammad Isti'lami (Tehran: Intisharat Zawar, 14th edition, 2005 reprint of 1967 original), 47.

[76] See Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 161-62 and 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 47-48.

[77] For the original quotation, see Muhammad 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Munawi, *al-Kawakib al-durriyya fi tarajim al-sadat al-sufiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Sadir, 1999), vol. 1, 288.

[78] Ibid, 285; A tomb that is purported to be Rabi'a's can still be found in Cairo today.

[79] Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, *Balaghat al-nisa'*, 204

[80] See Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: the Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, U. K.: The Clarendon Press, 1996).

[81] Taha 'Abd al-Baqi Surur, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya wa al-hayat al-ruhiyya fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1957), 51

Christians created monasticism for themselves even though God did not prescribe it for them (Qur'an, 57:27). As mentioned in Chapter 2, the verb used in the Qur'an to characterize the invention of monasticism is *ibtada'a*, which comes from the same root as *bid'a*, the term used in Islam for the unauthorized innovation of religious practices or doctrines. This Qur'anic verse is supported by a hadith that is often mistaken by Muslims for a Qur'anic ruling: "There is no monasticism in Islam" (*la rahbaniyyata fi al-Islam*). Abu Dawud al-Sijistani, who transmits this hadith in *Sunan Abi Dawud*, makes a point of clarifying that the Qur'anic verse and the hadith refer only to celibacy but not to asceticism, which is encouraged in Islam. To further underscore the point that only celibacy is criticized, Abu Talib al-Makki cites another well-known hadith in *Qut al-qulub*: "He who loves me makes my Sunna his example, which means marriage."[82]

There is no scriptural source in Islam that encourages celibacy the way that it is encouraged in Christianity. In the New Testament, celibacy is prescribed for full-time priests in the Book of Matthew (Matt. 19:12). In the Book of Matthew as well, women are encouraged to forsake childbearing for the sake of God (Matt. 19:29), and believers are told that the marriage bond does not apply in heaven (Matt. 22:30). In the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul states that he considers it best for a man not to take a wife (1 Cor. 7:1). In the same letter, Jesus is described as wishing that all men could follow his example of celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7), and that men should avoid marriage in order to avoid worldly temptations (1 Cor. 7:27).

However, even in the Qur'an, one sometimes finds celibacy mentioned with approval. For example, John the Baptist is described as chaste or celibate (*hasur*, Qur'an, 3:39). In addition, the Virgin Mary is praised for preserving her chastity (*ahsanat farjaha*, Qur'an, 21:91 and 66:12). Mary is also popularly known among Muslims as *al-Batul* (literally, "devoted" or "consecrated" to God), an epithet that is usually understood to mean "The Virgin" or "The Celibate."[83] Finally, there are verses in the Qur'an that refer to family and children as worldly temptations, such as the passage, "Verily, your possessions and your children are trials for you" (Qur'an, 64:14).

In Rabi'a's time, a number of well-known ascetics refused to marry. In part, this was a result of the misanthropic attitude of reactionary asceticism. In the previous chapter, we saw how the moral pessimism of such works as al-Mu'afa ibn 'Imran's *Kitab al-zuhd* led to exhortations against having children in a dangerous and sinful world. This prejudice against having a family (*ta'ahhul*) can be seen in a statement attributed to Ibrahim ibn Adham, one of the most famous celibate ascetics of Rabi'a's day. "If a Sufi marries, his similitude is like that of a man who travels on a boat; and if he has children, he is sunk."[84] At other times, Muslim ascetics expressed their rejection of marital or family life in terms of a cynical attitude toward social relations. The Prophet's cousin Ibn 'Abbas (d. 688 CE) asked rhetorically, "Can anyone ruin people other than other people?"[85] Malik ibn Dinar, a celibate ascetic and lover of God who was a generation older than Rabi'a stated, "A man will not attain the station of the true believers until he casts his wife

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[82] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 405

[83] See, for example, how the imperative (*tabattal*) and verbal noun forms of this term (*tabtila*) are used in Qur'an, 73:8: "Keep the remembrance of the name of your Lord with complete and utter devotion" (*wa'dhkur isma Rabbika wa tabattal ilayhi tabtila*).

[84] Sarraj, *al-Luma'* 199

[85] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*, 307

aside as if she were a widow and takes refuge in garbage dumps frequented by dogs."[86] Ibn Dinar was so averse to the concept of marriage that he is said to have stated, "If I could, I would divorce myself!"[87] Although Ibrahim ibn Adham also rejected marriage, he was more pragmatic about the subject. When asked why he did not marry, he replied, "What would you say about a man who deceives and cheats on his wife? If I were to marry a woman, she would ask from me what women ask. Yet I have nothing to do with women."[88] Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d. 830 CE), a celibate ascetic and early Sufi of Basra who later moved to Syria, rejected marriage because he disliked women in general. Seeing women as the embodiment of the World, he forbade his followers from marrying them as a form of ethical precaution (*wara'*). Darani clamed that companionship with women made the majority of men ignorant (*jahil*) and stupid (*safih*); thus, women should be avoided by all men who seek the presence of God.[89]

However, despite their disapproval of marriage, all of these male ascetics— even Darani— visited female ascetics such as Rabi'a and her contemporaries. In fact, not only did they visit female ascetics, they also visited them alone and after dark. This practice, which is attested to by 'Attar and other Sufi writers, has troubled modern Muslim moralists. For example, Su'ad 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq's concern about the impropriety of al-Hasan al-Basri spending the night alone in prayer with Rabi'a appears to be what caused her to try save Rabi'a's reputation by making her a married woman.[90]

Clearly, ascetic women were exceptions to the normal category of women in early Islam. As 'Attar famously states about Rabi'a in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, "When a woman is on the path of God Most High, she becomes a man."[91] Because such women were singled out for their exceptional virtue, it is reasonable to conclude that many of Rabi'a's female colleagues practiced celibacy as she did. Among the female ascetics in the region of Basra in Rabi'a's time, only Sha'wana is mentioned in a premodern source as having been married. However, even this claim is doubtful because it is mentioned without attribution by Ibn al-Jawzi, who lived four centuries after Sha'wana.[92]

In light of the abundant textual evidence attesting to the practice of celibacy in early Islam, and because of the ambiguity of scriptural passages and doctrinal statements about this subject, it is necessary to find a more theoretically adequate and less superficial way of comparing Muslim and Christian approaches to celibacy than has been attempted so far. As much as contemporary Muslim moralists might wish to deny that celibacy was once an accepted practice in Islam, it is undeniable that celibacy was widely tolerated, if not fully approved, in the early Muslim world. In fact, most, if not all, of the varieties of celibacy that were present in early

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[86] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 2, 259

[87] Ibid, 295

[88] Ibid, vol. 8, 21; this account contains the same trope as the "Why do you not marry?" account about Rabi'a in Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's *Balaghat al-nisa'*. Other examples of this trope can be found in Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 2, 261 and 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 47-48.

[89] See the discussion of Darani's view of marriage in Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 413-14. Darani's negative view of women was similar to that of Paul of Tarsus.

[90] 'Abd al-Raziq, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, 59; In order to underline the moral problem of Rabi'a and Hasan being alone together, 'Abd al-Raziq cites a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad forbids a man to be alone with a woman, "even if they are the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist."

[91] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 41 (Pers. *Chun zan dar rahi Khodayi Ta'ala mard bashad*.)

[92] See Ibn al-Jawzi Appendix in Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 304-305.

Christianity were present in early Islam as well. These even included some forms of celibacy that are usually thought to have been unique to Christianity.

For example, in 325 CE the Council of Nicaea forbade Christian priests and other celibate males to take into their houses, *synesaktoi*, women who lived with men as fictive "sisters" in a sort of pseudo-marriage.[93] Despite this prohibition, many Christian ascetics continued this practice through the end of the fourth century CE, especially in Syria.[94] It is thus probably not a coincidence that pseudo-marriages are also mentioned in early Sufi accounts from this region. For example, Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 988 CE) mentions a male Muslim ascetic who contracted a marriage but still had not consummated his union after thirty years.[95]

An even better example from Syria can be found in Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa*, where relations between the male Sufi Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari (d. 845 CE) and his wife Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Damascus are described in terms that are very similar to the practices of Syrian Christian *synesaktoi*. In an account that originally came from a lost work on early Muslim ascetics by the traditionist Ibn Abi al-Dunya (d. 894 CE), Rabi'a of Damascus says to her husband, "I do not love you in the way that married couples do; instead, I love you as one of the Sufi brethren. I wanted to be with you only in order to serve you, and I desired and hoped that my fortune would be consumed by someone like you and your brethren."[96] In the fourth century CE, the Christian bishop Basil of Ancyra condemned the *synesaktoi* of Antioch and other Syrian cities out of concern that such women would "forego divine love by living comfortably together with men who look after their earthly needs, all under the pretext of charity."[97] The main difference between Rabi'a bint Isma'il's example and the practice that Basil referred to was that in the latter case, Christian ascetics of higher status took in poor women as *synesaktoi* in order to be served by them. In the case of Rabi'a bint Isma'il, however, the social status of the spouses is reversed, such that a rich wife offers her wealth as charity to support her ascetic husband.

A more nuanced and culturally appropriate way of drawing a distinction between early Christian and Islamic approaches to celibacy is to think of celibacy as expressed in either "principled" or "vocational" forms. *Principled celibacy* is a form of celibacy that is based on scriptural foundations and is seen as fundamental to ascetic practice in general. Celibacy in early Christianity can be termed principled celibacy because it was sanctioned by scripture and was a central principle of both anchoretic (individual) and cenobitic (group) asceticism. In other words, it was very difficult to call oneself an ascetic in early Christianity unless one practiced celibacy. Other examples of principled celibacy can be found in Buddhism and Hinduism. However, celibacy in Judaism and Islam is best characterized as *vocational celibacy*. In both of these religions, celibacy is not a majoritarian practice for ascetics and is not sanctioned by either law or scripture. In cases where celibacy was tolerated, it was accepted as part of the ascetic life but was

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[93] Elm, *Virgins of God*, 48-51

[94] Ibid, 206

[95] Sarraj, *al-Luma'*, Arabic text 199; Had the male ascetic's wife chosen to do so, she could have petitioned for divorce on the grounds of non-consummation.

[96] Ibn al-Jawzi Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 316-17; Ibn Abi al-Dunya was the teacher of the Sufi biographer and theologian Abu Sa'id ibn al-A'rabi. The fact that this account originally came from a near-contemporaneous written source seriously undermines Julian Baldick's claim that Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Damascus never existed. See Baldick, "The Legend of Rabi'a of Basra," 237.

[97] Elm, *Virgins of God*, 50

not seen as fundamental to the practice of asceticism itself. This type of celibacy can be called "vocational" because it is based on individual choice and views marriage and family as impediments to the ascetic's principal vocation, which is devotion and service to God.

The concept of vocational celibacy is related to the concept of essential asceticism. This is clear in Rabi'a's statement about celibacy as recorded by Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur: "One requirement of God prevents me from fulfilling another of His requirements." What Rabi'a meant by this was that the undivided attention the ascetic gives to God leaves no room for anyone or anything else.[98] Abu Talib al-Makki makes the same point in his chapter on Love in *Qut al-qulub*: "He who wants to be loved by God must reject the World and must not even contemplate the love of God unless he renounces the World."[99] For the ascetic who follows this precept, marriage and family are distractions that divert the attention of God's lover from the Beloved.

In the original version of the account cited by Hurayfish and 'Abd al-Raziq, where al-Hasan al-Basri suggests to Rabi'a that she remarry, the Persian Sufi 'Attar depicts Rabi'a as "belonging" to God. However, unlike Margaret Smith, who views Rabi'a as the bride of God, 'Attar depicts her as the ward of God. In this account Rabi'a states, "I am not my own. I belong to [God] and I am under His command. Permission for a betrothal can come only from Him."[100] The subtext of this statement is the rule in Islamic jurisprudence that a virgin bride can only be given away in marriage by her guardian. For Rabi'a, God is the guardian (*wali*) of his ascetic devotees; if the ascetic remains celibate, this means that God has chosen to withhold permission from his ward to marry.[101] Hasan likes Rabi'a's answer to his question because it reflects the intimate relationship that prevails between God and the essential ascetic. However, it is also important to note that although this account concerns marriage, it is not about love. Although the point of 'Attar's story is the closeness of the relationship between the ascetic and God, this relationship is one of guardianship and dependency, not one of loving intimacy. Thus, the moral of this story most likely involves either the renunciation of the World that forms the basis of asceticism or the superiority of essential asceticism over instrumental asceticism.

Both of these themes are present in two of the most famous stories of marriage proposals to Rabi'a. These stories first appear in Abu Talib al-Makki's *Qut al-qulub*, a work that appeared nearly two centuries after Rabi'a's death. In one account, Rabi'a is petitioned for marriage by the Abbasid governor of Basra, Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Hashimi (fl. ca. 762 CE), who offers her 100,000 gold *dinars* as a bride price and 10,000 *dinars* a month as maintenance. Rabi'a refuses this offer with the following words: "It does not please me that you should be my slave and that all you possess should be mine or that you should distract me from God for a single moment."[102] Since Rabi'a was born around 714 CE, she would have been around 40 years old at

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[98] Pierre Hadot also sees essential asceticism as fundamental to Plotinus' (d. 270 CE) doctrine of Love. He characterizes Plotinian Love as "an invasion of the soul by a presence which leaves no room for anything but itself." See idem, *Plotinus*, 55.

[99] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 92

[100] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 47 and Sells, *Early Islamic Mysicism*, 161-2; the Sells translation states, "You must ask permission from him."

[101] This belief also corresponds to the Qur'anic view of God as the *wali* (guardian or protector) of the believers. See, for example, Qur'an, 2:257: "God is the guardian of those who believe; He takes them out of the darkness toward the light" (*Allahu waliyyu alladhina amanu, yukhrijuhum min al-zulumati ila al-nur*).

[102] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 94; see also, Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 29 and (Rainbow Bridge), 10.

the time of the governor's proposal. Although it is possible that a close kinsman of the Abbasid Caliph would have thought of marrying Rabi'a as a way of both honoring her and pleasing the inhabitants of Basra, such a scenario is unlikely. What is most important about this story is Rabi'a's refusal, which stresses the doctrinal point that marriage, especially to a rich spouse, is a distraction for the ascetic lover of God.

A similar point is made in the second story of Rabi'a's rejection of a marriage proposal in *Qut al-qulub*. This time the proposal is made by 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd. According to Louis Massignon, Ibn Zayd was the most important doctrinal successor of al-Hasan al-Basri.[103] As a preacher, he was famous for the quality of his sermons, which stressed moral virtue, sincerity, and the solitary life. Given Ibn Zayd's high moral standing, it is interesting that in some accounts he is rebuked for hypocrisy by either Hayyuna of al-Ubulla (see above) or Rabi'a. In the account from Makki's *Qut al-qulub*, Rabi'a refuses Ibn Zayd's proposal with the following rebuke: "Oh lustful one! Seek a lustful woman like yourself! What did you see in me that aroused your desire?"[104]

The moral of this story may simply be to remind Sufis that one cannot combine devotion to God with devotion to a spouse. As the Qur'an states, "God did not create two hearts in one body" (Qur'an, 33:4). However, the story may also have a more subtle meaning, in which Rabi'a is not really talking about worldly desire but rather about the difference between instrumental and essential forms of asceticism. Like the governor of Basra, Ibn Zayd may have wanted to marry Rabi'a in order to get "extra credit" from God by marrying a famous ascetic.

Another problem with this story concerns its historical accuracy. Sulami, writing in the generation after Makki, recounts the very same story. However, Sulami's version of the story is not about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya but about the other Rabi'a of Basra, Rabi'a al-Azdiyya.[105] We saw in Chapter 1 that accounts about the two Rabi'as were conflated by later historians and hagiographers. For example, in the fourteenth century CE, the Hanbali scholar Muhammad al-Dhahabi mistook one Rabi'a for the other in an account about "Rabi'a al'Adawiyya's" purported refusal to meet with Sufyan al-Thawri.[106] Since the real Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was widely assumed to have been the teacher of Thawri and would have met with him regularly, only Rabi'a al-Azdiyya could have refused to meet with him. A similar logic applies to Makki's story about the alleged proposal of 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd. Although Makki's account of Ibn Zayd's marriage proposal predates Sulami's, Sulami's account is more credible because he cites a chain of transmission that goes back to a resident of Basra who was a contemporary of the two women ascetics. In addition, Sulami states that Ibn Zayd was known to have been a close companion of Rabi'a al-Azdiyya.[107] Although Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya might also have known Ibn Zayd, no early account describes the two of them as being on such close terms. Thus, when Margaret Smith refers to Ibn Zayd as Rabi'a's "companion on the Way," she apparently was just the latest in a long line of writers who confused Rabi'a al-Azdiyya with Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.[108]

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[103] Massignon, *Essay*, 147-8

[104] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 94

[105] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 128-9

[106] See Chapter 1 above and Dhahabi, *Siyar*, vol. 8, 241.

[107] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 128-9

[108] Smith, *Rabi'a*, (Oneworld), 32 and (Rainbow Bridge), 13

a. An Incognito Presence: Rabi'a and Plato's Symposium

In Sufi writings, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is portrayed as the teacher of divine love *par excellence*. Although other Muslim ascetics also taught the doctrine of divine love in Rabi'a's time, this fact has made little difference to the development of the Sufi tradition of love mysticism. As Carl W. Ernst has observed, "It is striking that the Sufi tradition unanimously credits Rabi'a with these insights into love and regards her as the example of the pure lover of God."[109] According to Ernst, even the great Andalusian Sufi Muhammad (Muhyiddin) Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240 CE), who wrote a book of poems on divine love titled *The Interpreter of Desires* (*Tarjuman al-ashwaq*) stated that Rabi'a "analyzes and classes the categories of love to the point of being the most famous interpreter of love."[110] As we have seen, in Arabic-language Sufi texts, the trope of Rabi'a the Lover goes back to the Basra Sufi and theologian al-Harith al-Muhasibi, who flourished in the first half of the ninth century CE. In Persian-language Sufi texts, the trope of Rabi'a the Lover goes back to the late twelfth-century hagiographer Farid al-Din al-'Attar, who uses Rabi'a to exemplify the concept of mystical love.[111] Carl Ernst sums up Rabi'a's importance to the Sufi tradition of love mysticism in the following way: "Regardless of the difficulty of ascertaining her exact formulations, we may still invoke Rabi'a as the figure who stands for the first intensive meditations on the nature of mystical love in Islam."[112]

About fifty years after 'Attar created what was to become the standard version of the Rabi'a myth in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, a scholar from Jerusalem named 'Izz al-Din ibn 'Abd al-Salam al-Maqdisi (d. 1279 CE) composed a hagiographical work titled *Kitab sharh al-awliya'* (The Explanation of the Saints). One of the chapters of this work bears the title, "The Explanation of Rabi'a's State" (*Sharh hal Rabi'a*). In this chapter, Maqdisi conveys the following teaching attributed to Rabi'a on the mystery of Love:

> Between the lover and the beloved, there is no separation. Love is an expression of desire (*nutq 'an shawq*). It is the description of an experience (*dhawq*, literally, "taste") and only the one who has experienced it knows it. He who expresses it cannot be defined by it (*man wasafa fa-ma ittasafa*). How can one express a thing whose presence is absence, whose existence melts away, whose appearance is fleeting, whose sobriety is intoxication, whose emptiness is fullness, and whose happiness is infatuation? The awe it causes deprives the tongue of speech. The bewilderment it causes makes the coward act courageously. The jealousy it causes veils the sight of anything else. The perplexity it causes prevents reasoned thought. What else is left but everlasting astonishment, permanent bewilderment, hearts that are perplexed, secrets that are hidden, and bodies that are forever wasting away? Such is Love (*mahabba*), the Ruler of Hearts under her harsh regime (*bi-dawlatiha al-sarima fi-l-qulub hakima*)![113]

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[109] Ernst, "The Stages of Love," 439

[110] Ibid

[111] See, for example, Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld) 124 and (Rainbow Bridge), 99-100

[112] Ernst, "The Stages of Love," 439

[113] Portions of Maqdisi's work are reproduced in Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 177-78; According to Badawi, the original manuscript of this work can be found in Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, *fonds Arabes*, no. 1641.

In the passage after this selection, Maqdisi comments further on the mystery of Love in a poem of his own. After this, he eulogizes Rabi'a in a passage where the voices of the hagiographer and his subject merge into one:

> Have mercy on the lovers (*al-'ashiqin*), whose hearts
> Are bewildered and lost in the vast wilderness of Love (*mahabba*)!
>
> The resurrection of their desire *('ishq*) has taken place. Their souls
> Arise, with an endless and everlasting humility,
>
> Leading either toward gardens of eternal union
> Or toward a fire that blocks hearts and keeps them aflame!
>
> Oh Rabi'a! You are a wonder in the domain of Love! How is it that the image of actual reality (*surat al-waqi'a*), came to be named "Rabi'a"? If the state [of Love] is one, then from whence come this sharing (*sharika*) and unification (*mujama'a*)? She said: Oh people! Harmony is a rule of companionship. Do you not see that the offspring of Desire and Awe are not fulfilled unless they drink from the Sea of Love with Love's own drink? I saw him saying to his companion in the cave: "Do not despair, for God is with us." What do you think of "two" when God is the third of two? Then, I advanced toward the solitude of the cave with true commitment. But Jealousy cried out from inside the cave: "Who is this infatuated and anxious woman who removes the veil of contentment and yet is content with us alone?"[114]

This remarkable passage contains a number of important allusions. The first allusion is to *Surat al-Waqi'a* in the Qur'an (Qur'an, 56, "The Event" or "The Actual Reality"). This *sura* contains some of the most famous Qur'anic descriptions of the rewards of heaven that await believers and the punishments of Hell that await sinners. In the above passage, Maqdisi creates a pun that uses this Qur'anic reference as a metaphor, in which *sura* with the letter *sin*, meaning a Qur'anic discourse, is replaced by *sura* with the letter *sad*, meaning "image." In this way, Maqdisi portrays Rabi'a as the icon or "image" of the Qur'anic *Surat al-Waqi'a*. Another important allusion in this passage is to the famous account of the cave on Mount Thawr near Mecca, where the Prophet Muhammad and his friend Abu Bakr hid for three days during their flight from Mecca to Medina. In popular accounts of this story, Muhammad tells Abu Bakr not to fear their discovery by Meccan search parties, for "God is with us."[115] In Maqdisi's text, the Prophet Muhammad personifies Love and reminds Abu Bakr that one of the most important signs of love is trust in the Beloved.

However, along with these Islamic references, Maqdisi's text also contains other allusions, which evoke Plato as much as they evoke the Qur'an or the image of the Prophet. One trace of Platonic influence can be seen in Maqdisi's conflation of love-as-*mahabba* with love-as-

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[114] Ibid, 178

[115] This version of the story of the cave does not appear in *Sirat Rasul Allah* (Biography of the Messenger of God) by Muhammad ibn Ishaq (d. 768 CE) or in the later edition of this work by Ibn Hisham (d. ca. 833 CE). See Arnold Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1970 [reprint of 1955 first edition]), 224-25. Many Muslims believe that Sura 29 of the Qur'an, *al-'Ankabut* (The Spider), refers to the spider's web that was supposed to have hidden the Prophet and Abu Bakr from their pursuers by being stretched across the mouth of the cave. However, the title of this *sura* actually refers to the thinness of the spider's web, which is likened to the vain hopes of those who take protectors other than God (Qur'an, 29:41).

'ishq in the poem that follows Rabi'a's statement. As noted earlier in this chapter, the primary connotation of love in early Islam was affection, which corresponds to the Arabic terms *hubb* and *mahabba*. Only later was divine love expressed as *'ishq*, which connotes physical longing or desire. In Plato's *Dialogues*, as in the works of the Greek philosophers in general, the Greek term *eros*, which connotes physical desire, was used to express the concept of Love as a principle. Because the term *'ishq* began to appear as a synonym for *mahabba* in Muslim writings at about the same time that Greek philosophical works were beginning to be translated into Arabic, some scholars of Islam have suggested that *'ishq* first came into Islamic discourse as the Arabic translation of *eros*.[116]

Besides the conflation of *mahabba* and *'ishq*, other possible traces of Platonic influence can also be found in Maqdisi's chapter on Rabi'a. For example, Rabi'a's personification of Love as a great (feminine) ruler might be seen as alluding to the personification of Love as Aphrodite or Phaedrus' description of Love as a "mighty god" in Plato's *Symposium*.[117] In addition, Maqdisi's description of Love as a paradox of opposites recalls Plato's discussion of the spirit of Eros in the *Symposium*, which is described as occupying a paradoxical space in-between the human and divine realms.[118] Other possible echoes of Plato's *Symposium* can be found in Rabi'a's comment on the harmony that Love seeks to create between souls. This brings to mind Eryximachus' depiction of Love as the creator of harmony among the elements.[119] Maqdisi's depiction of the spiritual lover as the offspring of Desire and Awe evokes one of the mythological portions of the *Symposium*, where Eros is portrayed as the offspring of Poverty and Plenty.[120] The final hint of Plato in Maqdisi's text is in the passage where Jealousy cries out from "inside the cave" and asks, "Who is this infatuated and anxious woman who removes the veil of contentment and yet is content with us alone?" This passage is reminiscent of the Myth of the Cave in Book VII of Plato's *Republic* and of the priestess Diotima of Mantineia, who unveils the higher mysteries of Love for Socrates in the *Symposium*.[121]

Because of the frequency of such Platonic allusions, might one arguably characterize Maqdisi's Rabi'a as a "Muslim Diotima?" Do traces of Plato's *Symposium* pervade other Sufi depictions of Rabi'a and her teachings on divine love? Although she does not mention it explicitly, this possibility seems to have occurred to Margaret Smith, for she includes a passage from the *Symposium* in the chapter on love mysticism in her book *Rabi'a the Mystic*.[122] Furthermore, Smith adds a statement that would make no sense if she were not thinking of a

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[116] See, for example, Bell, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, where Bell often combines these two terms as "*'ishq* (eros)" in his translation of Daylami's *'Atf al-alif*. Richard Walzer equates *'ishq* with *eros* and *mahabba* with the Greek term *philia* (friendship, affection). Furthermore, he attributes the use of this terminology to the influence of a passage in the sixth book of Plotinus' *Enneads*. See idem, "Commentary" to Abu Nasr al-Farabi, *On the Perfect State* (Mabadi' ara' ahl al-madinah al-fadilah), Richard Walzer, ed. (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1998 reprint of 1985 Oxford University Press original), 352.

[117] Plato, *The Symposium* in B. Jowett ed., *The Dialogues of Plato in Four Volumes* (Boston and New York: The Jefferson Press, 1871), vol. 1, 473-5

[118] See Louis A. Ruprecht Jr., *Symposia: Plato, the Erotic, and Moral Value* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 48-57. See also, Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 495.

[119] Plato, *The Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 481

[120] Ibid, 495-7

[121] Ibid, 497; For the Myth of the Cave, see Plato, *The Republic*, in Jowett, vol. 2, 841-7.

[122] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 119 and (Rainbow Bridge), 94-5

comparison between Rabi'a and the figure of Diotima in the *Symposium*. "[Plato] makes Diotima of Mantineia set forth the doctrine of love leading to the beatific vision, and foreshadow the ideals of the mystics of all creeds who were to come after her, and who were to seek the way to God through love."[123] Much the same could be said of the Sufi works that speak about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.

For Plato, Diotima was "a wise woman in [Love] and many other branches of knowledge."[124] Abu Talib al-Makki says much the same about Rabi'a in *Qut al-qulub*. "She was known for her proven reliability in the doctrine of Love" (*idh kana laha fi-l-mahabba qidamu sidqin*).[125] Ironically, both Rabi'a and Diotima may share the status of being mythologized historical figures. Although most Plato scholars assume that Diotima was a figment of Plato's imagination, Louis Ruprecht believes that the name might refer to a real person. Ruprecht observes that all of the male characters in the *Symposium* were real people who lived during the first part of the Peloponnesian War. If Socrates too is real, and if he was a soldier of Athens as Plato claims, it is likely that he participated in the battle of Mantineia in 418 BCE.[126] If so, he might have met a priestess there who was named Diotima. However, just as the myth of Rabi'a bears only a partial resemblance to the real Rabi'a, Plato's figure of Diotima may also represent more rhetoric than fact. The name *Diotima* in Greek means "honored by Zeus" or "honoring Zeus" and *Mantineia*, which refers to a city in the Arcadian region of Greece, is related to the Greek word, *mantis*, meaning "seer."[127] Much like Rabi'a, Diotima is portrayed by Plato as a religious expert and teacher of men, who initiates her students into the truth that lies behind the mysteries. Whether or not she was a real person, the most important point about Diotima, in the words of Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan, is that she is "a dialectical image, not thrice removed from the original, but a paradigm herself through which one may see the truth she represents and of which she speaks."[128] The Greek word for "image" is *ikon* and Diotima and Rabi'a both come down to us through history as literary icons that transcend both time and space.

However, the main problem with seeing Rabi'a as the Muslim Diotima is that no conclusive evidence exists that early Muslims were acquainted with the text of Plato's *Symposium* in detail. According to Dimitri Gutas, "Plato's *Symposion* (*sic*) was very little known in the medieval Arab world. As far as it can be ascertained, no direct translation of the full Greek text was ever made; the Arab bibliographers say nothing on the subject, and no verbatim quotations that might derive from such a translation have ever been recovered."[129] Gutas characterizes the *Symposium* as an "incognito" presence in Islamic literature, and claims that it was first introduced through a paraphrase by the philosopher Abu Ya'qub al-Kindi (d. 866 CE) or through "gnomic fragments current in Graeco-Arabic wisdom literature."[130] Evidence to support

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[123] Ibid (Oneworld), 120 and (Rainbow Bridge), 95

[124] Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 494

[125] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 95

[126] Ruprecht, *Symposia*, 44-50

[127] Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic at Play: Argument, Structure, and Myth in the* Symposium (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 111

[128] Ibid, 115

[129] Dimitri Gutas, "Plato's *Symposion* in the Arabic Tradition," in idem, *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition* (Aldershot, Hampshire, U. K. and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate-Variorum, 2000), IV, 36

[130] Ibid, 37-8

Gutas' contention can be found in the fact that the extant allusions to the *Symposium* in Islamic literature mostly discuss theories that Plato rejects in this work, such as the myth of Aristophanes that souls were originally created round and that Love consists of the soul's search for completeness by finding its missing half.[131] Nowhere does one find Diotima mentioned by name, nor does one find detailed references to her teaching of the higher states of love, which is the real point of the *Symposium*.

However, other evidence suggests that the lack of mention of a full translation of the *Symposium* in extant Arabic sources does not necessarily mean that such a translation did not exist. For example, Ihsan Abbas, the noted Lebanese scholar of medieval Arabic literature, believed that Plato's *Symposium* was in fact translated into Arabic and that it was known in the Muslim world by the end of the second century A.H. (eighth century CE).[132] If Abbas' hypothesis is correct, this would date the translation of the *Symposium* to around the time of Rabi'a's death in 801 CE. Thus, it would be reasonable to suppose that the *Symposium* provided the rhetorical model for Rabi'a as the "Muslim Diotima." Abbas bases his claim about the translation of the *Symposium* on a section of a chapter in the historical work *Muruj al-dhahab* (The Pastures of Gold) by 'Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mas'udi (d. 958 CE). This work describes an intellectual salon (*majlis*, literally, "sitting") on the subject of Love-as-*'ishq* that was held in Baghdad by the Abbasid vizier Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki (d. 805 CE). The discussion in this salon apparently included Plato's *Symposium*. For Ihsan Abbas, the concept of the *majlis* in Abbasid court society was based on the concept of the symposium, which was widely known in the Middle East through the influence of Hellenism.[133] In Abbas' opinion, the Barmakid *majlis* on Love was modeled after Plato's *Symposium*. This is confirmed for him by references to parts of Plato's text in the account of the *majlis* in *Muruj al-Dhahab*.[134]

Whether or not Abbas was correct to consider Yahya al-Barmaki's salon as based on Plato's *Symposium*, Mas'udi's discussion of this gathering appears to refute the contention of Dimitri Gutas that the *Symposium* was first introduced to the Muslim world by the philosopher Kindi. Since Kindi lived a generation after this event took place, it is not likely that he provided the first Arabic paraphrase of the *Symposium*. An examination of Mas'udi's account in fact reveals several references to the *Symposium*. The clearest of these is a paraphrase of the discourse of Aristophanes. "One of [the guests] said: God created every soul round in the shape of a ball. Then He divided them into portions and made every body out of one half. Therefore, when a body encounters the body which was the half that was originally cut away from it, Love-as-desire (*'ishq*) occurs by necessity between the two of them because of their primordial

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[131] See Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 482-7; references to this myth first begin to appear in Arabic in the late ninth and early tenth centuries CE. See, for example, the reference to the myth of Aristophanes in Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Dawud al-Isfahani's (d. 910 CE) *Kitab al-zahra*. Idem, *al-Nisf al-awwal min Kitab al-zahra*, Louis Nichol Al Bouhaymi and Ibrahim 'Abd al-Fattah Tuqan, eds. (Beirut: Jesuit Printing House, 1932), 15

[132] Ihsan Abbas, Introduction to Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, *Tawq al-hamama fi-l-ulfa wa al-alaf*, ed. Ihsan Abbas (Sousse, Tunisia: Dar al-Ma'arif li-l-Taba'a wa al-Nashr, reprint of 1980 first edition, n.d.), 9

[133] Arabic sources report the existence of elite intellectual salons as early as the Umayyad period. For example, the great-granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad, Sukayna bint al-Husayn (d. 738 CE), was famous for hosting such *majalis*. See Amira El Zein, "Love Discourse in Hijazi Society under the Umayyads: A Study in Class and Gender," in Sonbol ed., *Gulf Women*, 117-119.

[134] Ibid, 11

relationship."[135] Equally significant is a statement about Love that Mas'udi attributes to Plato (*Aflatun*): "I do not know what Love (*hawa*, another term for Love-as-desire) is, other than the spirit of beauty (*junun al-hayyi'*). Also, Love is neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy."[136] This statement seems to be a paraphrase of portions of Diotima's teaching to Socrates in the *Symposium*, in which Love is described as neither fair nor foul and that Love is a spirit (Gr. *daimon*) whose essence is beauty.[137]

The best evidence in *Muruj al-dhahab* for a complete or nearly complete translation of the *Symposium* in Arabic comes in the paragraph that follows Mas'udi's paraphrase of the discourse of Aristophanes. The opening sentence of this paragraph states, "Those who are responsible for this discussion (*maqala*) have other statements that expand on the subject we have just discussed."[138] Ihsan Abbas interprets this as indicating that a complete or nearly complete version of the *Symposium* was known to exist in Mas'udi's time. Furthermore, the statement also indicates that the topics discussed in the *Symposium* were subjects of significant discussion and debate among Muslims at the height of the Abbasid era.

Many scholars, both inside and outside of the Muslim world, have commented on the influence of Neo-Platonism on Sufi mysticism. It is not necessary to repeat these observations here. However, it is worth suggesting that this emphasis on Neo-Platonism may have obscured the influence of Plato's own works on the Sufi tradition. Now that it can be argued that the contents of the *Symposium* were in fact more widely known in the generation after Rabi'a than Gutas and other skeptics have assumed, it becomes easier to suggest parallels between Plato's depiction of Diotima of Mantineia and the depiction of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in Sufi literature. As we shall see below, these parallels are so numerous as to make their chance occurrence unlikely.

However, to agree with Gutas on at least one point, it must be conceded that the trope of "Rabi'a the Muslim Diotima" was an "incognito" presence in Sufi literature. Even if a full Arabic translation of Plato's *Symposium* is eventually found, one is not likely to find an explicit reference to it or to Diotima in any Sufi work. On the contrary, because Sufism was often criticized as an innovation, Sufi authors tended to minimize references to non-Muslim sources other than the traditions of the Judeo-Christian prophets.[139] Until now, no explicit reference to

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[135] Abu al-Husayn 'Ali ibn al-Husayn b. 'Ali al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar*, ed. Mufid Muhammad Qumayha (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1985), vol. 3, 457. The passage quoted above paraphrases only the summary of the myth that appears at the end of Aristophanes' discourse in the *Symposium*. The language of this section is more in accord with Muslim sensibilities than are other parts of Plato's text, since it speaks of God in the singular and lacks references to homosexuality. See Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 486.

[136] Mas'udi, *Muruj al-dhahab*, vol. 3, 458; Socrates (*Buqrat*) is also quoted in this account as saying that Love is the mingling of two souls (456).

[137] See Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 496-7 and 498. ("Love is only birth in beauty, whether of body or soul.") The Arabic terms *jinn* or *junun* (from the Latin *genius*) refer to living spirits or guardian-spirits in the same sense as the Greek terms *daimon* or *daimones*.

[138] Mas'udi, *Muruj al-dhahab*, vol. 3, 457

[139] A similar phenomenon can be observed in early Christian texts. For example, Elizabeth A. Clark has found earlier "incognito" traces of Diotima in Gregory of Nyssa's fourth-century CE discussion of the wisdom of his saintly sister Macrina in *Life of Macrina* and *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. See Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 178-79. Works such as these from the Capadoccian tradition of Christian writing were likely to have been available in Iraq in the Abbasid period.

Diotima has been found in any Islamic text, nor is one likely to find such a reference. Nevertheless, the parallels between Rabi'a and Diotima as iconic figures are striking, and they extend throughout Sufi literature from the tenth century CE until modern times. Some of the most important of these parallels are enumerated below, with special attention being given to discussions of Rabi'a the Lover in Abu Talib al-Makki's *Qut al-qulub* and Farid al-Din al-'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*. However, it should be added that one could add other parallels to this list and if the list took account of the parallels to be found in the full variety of Sufi works, the subject of "Rabi'a the Muslim Diotima" might comprise a book in itself.

    b. *Sharpening the Dialectical Image: Rabi'a and Diotima Compared*

    1. Both Diotima and Rabi'a teach Love as a wisdom tradition. Plato describes Diotima as "a woman wise in [Love] and many other branches of knowledge." The trope of Rabi'a the Teacher, discussed in Chapter 1, similarly establishes Rabi'a's reputation as a teacher of wisdom. The figure of Rabi'a as a wise teacher of love mysticism was first developed by the Sufi Abu Talib al-Makki in his masterpiece, *Qut al-qulub* (The Sustenance of Hearts). In this work, Rabi'a is described as "one of the lovers" (*wa kanat ihda al-muhibbin*).[140] This is not a casual remark. For Makki, Love is the final stage of the Station of Certainty (*maqam al-yaqin*), which is the culmination of the Sufi path. The discussion of this station takes up 253 pages of the latest edition of *Qut al-qulub*. It comprises the central part of the book and includes its most important teachings. The Sufi attains the Station of Certainty by ascending through nine spiritual states (*ahwal*): Repentance (*tawba*), Patience (*sabr*), Thankfulness (*shukr*), Hope (*raja'*), Fear (*khawf*), Renunciation (*zuhd*), Trust (*tawakkul*), Satisfaction (*rida*), and Love (*mahabba*). "[*Mahabba*] is the love of the spiritual elites (*al-khusus*)," says Makki. "It is the love of the [divine] Beloved (*mahabbat al-mahbub*)."[141] As we shall see in the next chapter, for Makki Love is also the culmination of the Sufi way of knowledge. In *Qut al-qulub* the discussion of Rabi'a the Lover appears in the final portion of the final chapter on the Station of Certainty. By putting his discussion of Rabi'a the Lover at the end of his discourse on Love, Makki signals to the reader that the figure of Rabi'a the Lover symbolizes the essence of Sufi wisdom.

    2. Both Diotima and Rabi'a teach the essence of Love. In the *Symposium*, Diotima teaches the way of "true love" and the "true order" of the spiritual quest that leads to the mystical vision of "true divine beauty . . . pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality."[142] Like Socrates, she is a teacher whose lessons go directly to the essence of her arguments by stripping away the veils of rhetoric. In *Qut al-qulub*, Makki similarly describes Rabi'a's the Lover as one who has "truly experienced the ardor of the lovers" (*wajd al-muhibbin al-muhiqqin*).[143] By using the Arabic term *muhiqq* (fem. *muhiqqa*) in this passage, Makki informs the reader that Rabi'a has attained the full meaning of the doctrine of Love. For the later Sufi writer Farid al-Din al-'Attar, whose fictionalized treatment of Rabi'a was to turn the trope of Rabi'a the Lover into the paradigm for an entire tradition of Rabi'a stories, the importance of her

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[140] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 94

[141] Ibid, vol. 1, 317

[142] Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 508

[143] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 95

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teaching transcends even the limitations of gender: "In unity (*tawhid*), how can your existence and mine remain, much less 'man' and 'woman'?"[144]

      3. Both Diotima and Rabi'a are outsiders. In their book on Plato's *Symposium*, Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan remark that Diotima is able to resolve the arguments of the guests at the symposium because she is an outsider. As they put it, her image is that of a "nonparticipating participator, an image with just the right mixture of reality and mystery to make us realize that not her personality, but her teaching, is of ultimate importance."[145] As if to underscore this point, just before Diotima gives her final statement on Love as the vision of Absolute Beauty, Plato reintroduces her to the reader as "the stranger (foreigner) of Mantineia."[146] As the Corrigans point out, this social distance gives objectivity to Diotima's teaching.[147] In a passage discussed earlier in this chapter, the Muslim hagiographer Maqdisi similarly portrays Rabi'a as a "strange" woman, although in this case her oddity rather than her foreignness is stressed. However, Rabi'a is also portrayed in Sufi hagiography as a stranger in social and geographical terms. Although she is *of* Basra, in that she belongs to one of the city's major Arab clans, she is not portrayed as living *in* Basra but outside of the city. For example, in 'Attar's fictionalized biography of Rabi'a, she withdraws for meditation to a place of seclusion beyond the city walls.[148] Whenever male visitors come to see her, they are depicted as walking a significant distance to find her. This physical displacement in a separate location gives Rabi'a, like Diotima, the neutral space she needs to make her role more effective.

      The statements attributed to Rabi'a and the anecdotes about her that one finds in Sufi hagiographies increase in number the longer one goes in time between the age in which she lived and the present. For example, it takes 200 years after her death before Sulami first identifies her as the quintessential Muslim woman saint. It takes another 200 years before 'Attar can write a biography for Rabi'a in the modern sense of the term by using oral traditions, rhetorical tropes, and fictional narratives to make up a coherent life-story. The elements of this story continued to be added and embellished until the mid-twentieth century, when screenplays about Rabi'a's life were composed for Egyptian television and film. Rabi'a's influence on the tradition of Sufism has continued to grow until the present— through the writings of Margaret Smith and others, her reputation has even reached beyond the borders of Islam itself. Thus, like Diotima, Rabi'a becomes more of an iconic figure the farther she is from her origin in both time and space.

      4. Both Diotima and Rabi'a are consecrated figures. Diotima is a priestess of Love from Mantineia. Plato tells us that she kept the plague away from Athens for ten years by performing a sacrifice.[149] Rabi'a the Lover is a Sufi and ascetic devotee of God from Basra. Like the priestess Diotima, she is also both virgin and celibate. In a way that is unusual for a Muslim writer, the Persian Sufi 'Attar describes Rabi'a as a priestess-like figure, who performs a distinctive form of metaphorical sacrifice. "This one is veiled with a special veil," he writes, "veiled with the veil of

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[144] Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 155, and 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 41

[145] Corrigan and Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 113

[146] Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 503

[147] Corrigan and Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 114 and Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 494

[148] See Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 159 and 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 65. Michael Sells interprets this passage as meaning that Rabi'a retires to "a place of meditation." However, the Persian text has her going into retreat in a tower or cell (Pers. *dar soma'a mu'takif shod*).

[149] Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 494

sincerity, burned up with Love (*'ishq*) and longing (*ishtiyaq*), and enamored of selfless devotion (*qurb*) and the fire of sacrifice (*ihtiraq*)."[150]

As a medieval Iranian, 'Attar would have been aware of the concept of sacrifice as one of the most important signs of religious devotion. *Qurban* is a common Persian word for sacrifice and literally means, "attaining nearness." *Qurban Husayn*, "The Sacrifice of Husayn," is a name that is used by Shiite Muslims today. 'Attar's use of the terms *qurb* ("nearness") and *ihtiraq* ("burning") in his characterization of Rabi'a was not accidental. These terms recall not only the Islamic notion of sacrifice, but also the pre-Islamic notion of sacrifice, in which offerings consecrated to God are burned on an altar. The concept of the purifying flame, which is central to the religion of Zoroastrianism, remains an important symbol in Iranian culture even today. To establish his image of Rabi'a as a sort of "priestess" who has consecrated herself to God, 'Attar describes her as "the Deputy of the Virgin Mary" (Pers. *na'ib Maryam-i Safiyyeh*).[151] The term *Maryam-i Safiyyeh*, which in Persian means "Mary the Pure," recalls the Arabic appellation of the Virgin Mary as *al-Batul*, "The Consecrated One." Makki's description of Rabi'a the Lover in *Qut al-qulub* also stresses the concept of consecration, in that he makes selfless devotion (*ithar*) the key to her practice of Love as a spiritual method.[152]

5. Both Diotima and Rabi'a are examiners or testers of famous men. Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan make an important but often overlooked point when they highlight the importance of testing or cross-examination in the teacher-student relationship between Diotima and Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*.[153] The use of cross-examination (Gr. *anakrinousa*, Ar. *imtihan*) as a pedagogical device is one of the clearest similarities between the tropes of Diotima and Rabi'a as teachers of men. We saw in Chapter 1 how the trope of Rabi'a the Teacher partly depended on this method. Pierre Hadot has noted that Plato's concept of argumentation involved both formal arguments and *psychogogy*, "the seduction of souls."[154] One of the ways that women teachers of famous men such as Diotima or Rabi'a could "seduce" their students to learn from them was through a dialectical form of questioning that radically challenged their assumptions. In the *Symposium*, Plato seems to suggest that Diotima taught Socrates the method of cross-examination for which he became famous. Similarly, the concept of *ta'dib*, which the jurist Sufyan al-Thawri used to characterize Rabi'a the Teacher, referred to a type of moral training that made use of the pedagogical techniques of systematic discipline, cross-examination, and critical self-examination. Diotima and Rabi'a both taught a spiritual method that was based on a form of dialectical questioning that led to the cultivation of mystical knowledge, social virtue, righteousness, and wisdom. In both cases as well, the "tough love" of cross-examination and critique were important aspects of their wisdom teaching. As Diotima points out in the *Symposium*, these methods are important to the spiritual life because they are the pedagogical methods used by Love itself.[155]

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[150] Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 155 and 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 61; the present translation of this passage differs in significant ways from Sells' translation.

[151] Ibid

[152] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 89

[153] Corrigan and Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 108

[154] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 92

[155] On the "science of Beauty," see Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 502.

6. Both Diotima and Rabi'a initiate their students into the higher mysteries of Love. The dialogue between Diotima and Socrates in the *Symposium* introduces the reader to a doctrine of Love that is mystical, in contrast to the other theories of Love in this work, which are mythological, medical, or ethical.[156] Plato's text speaks of lesser and greater mysteries of Love, and provides a doctrinal ladder by which the apprentice can ascend to the higher states of the mysteries.[157] According to Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan, the femininity of Diotima and the balance of the sexes between the female teacher and the male initiate symbolize the "creative recipience" of the path of mystical initiation, a point that is accentuated by Diotima's discussion of "creative souls," sexual union, and Love's "birth in beauty."[158]

Makki's discussion of Rabi'a the Lover in *Qut al-qulub* similarly stresses Rabi'a's role as an initiator of others into the higher mysteries of Love. Medieval Islamic works on Love borrowed heavily from Greek philosophical and medical writings as well as from the cultural traditions of the Arabs, and discussed medical, ethical, and even mythological theories of Love.[159] Makki takes great pains to convince the reader that "the Love that comes from God" (*al-mahabba min Allah*) is not like ordinary love. Ordinary love, he says, has seven causes: natural inclination, sex, benefit to the self, an inborn characteristic, lust, needful compassion, and the desire to become closer to God.[160] By contrast, the higher mysteries of Love are linked to asceticism and the transcendence of self, as expressed in Rabi'a's teachings. The longing (*shawq*) that motivates this higher Love is related to the altruistic renunciation of self-interest (*ithar*) and the desire of the soul for inner peace and tranquility (*al-sakina*).[161]

At the end of her discourse in the *Symposium*, Diotima speaks of the highest stage of Love as a state of peaceful communion, where images of beauty are beheld in their realities, and where the initiate into the mysteries exists in converse with Beauty as the "immortal friend of God."[162] Likewise, Makki prefaces his discussion of Rabi'a's Love theory by describing the abode of God's intimates (*al-muqarrabun*, literally "those who are brought near") in the Gardens of the Righteous, where the fruits of Love's mysteries are conjoined, just as knowledge and action are conjoined in the Qur'an. Much like Plato in the *Symposium*, Makki describes this state as a visionary experience (*ru'ya*), which only those who have attained nearness to God can behold: "Only God's intimates shall behold it" (*yashhaduhu al-muqarrabun*).[163]

7. Both Diotima and Rabi'a teach Love as the key to knowledge of God. In the *Symposium*, Plato signals his intention to talk about Love as a way of knowledge by saying that Diotima will speak about "a *logos* pertaining to Love."[164] The Greek word *logos*, like the Arabic

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[156] See, for example, Corrigan and Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 108. I agree with the Corrigans but not with Hadot, who sees nothing mystical in Plato's doctrine of Love. See Hadot, *Plotinus*, 54. ("Platonic love thus is not, properly speaking, a 'mystical transport.'")

[157] Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 502-3

[158] Corrigan and Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 114 and Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 498-9

[159] For a discussion of medieval Islamic theories on what today might be called the "pathology" of love, see the chapter on "The Romantic Fool," in Dols, *Majnun*, 313-48.

[160] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 86

[161] Ibid, 91

[162] Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 503

[163] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 93-4

[164] Corrigan and Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 114

word *kalima*, can mean "word," "discourse," or "knowledge," depending on the context. At the beginning of her discourse, Diotima addresses the subject of knowledge by asking Socrates to define the mean between wisdom and ignorance. The correct answer to this question, "right opinion" (*ortho-doxa*), is not yet true knowledge because it is based more on dogma than on reason; however, it is not ignorance either, because it still contains part of the truth.[165]

The trope of Rabi'a the Teacher also depends on the idea that true knowledge transcends dogma. As a teacher of wisdom (*hikma*), Rabi'a's knowledge, like Diotima's, transcends both supposition (*zann*) and "orthodox" creed (*'aqida*). For Plato, the key to the path of knowledge through Love is remembrance, for as Diotima says, knowledge needs to be renewed by remembrance or else it is lost.[166] Thus, the greatest mysteries of Love are attained through remembrance. The paradox of the contemplation of Absolute Beauty, which is the goal of the initiatory path for Plato, is that true knowledge of Beauty consists of the recollection of what one already knows. The recollection (*tadhakkur*) of what one already knows is also part of the Sufi way of knowledge as expressed by Abu Talib al-Makki. For Makki, Love and knowledge are two sides of the same coin: "The special knowers of God (*khusus al-'arifin*) have a special kind of Love" (*khassat al-mahabba*) but the ordinary knowers of God have an ordinary form of love" (*wa li-'umumihim 'umum al-mahabba*)."[167] Certainty (*yaqin*) is only found in the knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) that is attained by those who love— and thus know— God most intimately. Therefore, one only attains the wisdom that is the goal of the Sufi path by finding knowledge of divine unity (*tawhid*) on the path of Love (*mahabba*).

For Makki, knowing God through Love is less a ladder of ascent, as it was for Plato, than a type of equation. The attainment of true and certain knowledge is the product of the addition of Love (*mahabba*) to the understanding of God's unity (*tawhid*). Echoing Socrates' description of Diotima in the *Symposium*, Makki states that Rabi'a is famous among Sufis because of her unique reliability and experience in matters of Love. In a classically Platonic way, he describes Rabi'a's knowledge of God as based on the vision that Love provides through the Eye of Certainty (*mushahadat 'ayn al-yaqin*), rather than through the ordinary means of confirmed traditions or true hearsay (*khabar wa sam' tasdiq*). Makki sums up his Platonic view Love in *Qut al-qulub* by paraphrasing what he understands to be Rabi'a's Love theory: "My love for you is through a vision that brought me closer to you, made me hurry toward you, preoccupied me with you, and cut me off from everything other than you. Before that, I had scattered passions, but, when I truly witnessed you, all of my passions merged into one and you became the entirety of the heart and the totality of Love" (*fa-sirta anta kulliyata al-qalb wa jumlat al-mahabba*).[168]

IV RABI'A THE LOVE POET

Makki's paraphrase of Rabi'a's Love theory in *Qut al-qulub* recalls the conclusion of the discussion of love mysticism in Plato's *Symposium*, in which Diotima states: "What if man had eyes to see the true beauty— the divine beauty, I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality, and all the colors and vanities of human life— thither looking,

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[165] Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 494
[166] Ibid, 500
[167] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 86
[168] Ibid, 95

and holding converse with the true beauty divine and simple, and bringing into being and educating true creations of virtue and not idols only?"[169] The trope of two loves— a passionate love that corresponds to the lesser mysteries of worldly love versus a love of remembrance and contemplation of divine beauty that corresponds to the "greater and more hidden mysteries" of Love— is central to Diotima's teachings. Although the lesser mysteries of love are accessible to anyone with understanding, the bridge from the lesser mysteries to the greater mysteries, "which are the crown of these," is crossed only by a few. Even to Socrates Diotima says, "I know not whether you will be able to attain [this]."[170] A similar trope of two loves is also central to Rabi'a's Love theory as portrayed in Sufi narratives from Makki's day to the present. Theologically, this trope has been linked to the famous verse of the Qur'an that states, "God did not create two hearts for man in his breast" (Qur'an, 33:4). As a literary trope, it most famously appears in Rabi'a's, "Poem of the Two Loves."

a. The Poem of the Two Loves

Abu Talib al-Makki introduces the final portion of his discussion of Love in *Qut al-qulub* with a poem that he says was attributed to Rabi'a "by the people of Basra and others."[171] This poem has become famous in Sufi literature as the "Poem of the Two Loves." As sources for his attribution of the poem to Rabi'a, Makki cites four men who are often associated with Rabi'a in Sufi writings: Ja'far ibn Sulayman ad-Dab'i (d. 794-95 CE), Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 778 CE), Hammad ibn Zayd (d. 793 CE), and 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd (d. 793-94 CE).[172] These names give credibility to Makki's attribution of the poem to Rabi'a because all are associated with Basra and all lived in Rabi'a's time. However, no extant source prior to Makki mentions Rabi'a or any of these men as the author of this poem. At the present time, it is impossible to determine who actually composed the Poem of the Two Loves. Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 990 CE), writing a short time before Makki, cites a slightly different version of the poem in the section on Love in his treatise *al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf* (Understanding the Doctrines of the Sufis). However, unlike Makki, he does not attribute the poem to Rabi'a. Instead, he only says, "One of [the Sufis] recited [it]."[173] As far as we know today, Makki was the first person to attribute the Poem of the Two Loves to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.

Because of the uncertainty about its origins, it is best to consider the Poem of the Two Loves as belonging to Sufism as a whole as much as to Rabi'a. Makki's attribution of the poem to Rabi'a and his exegesis of its text were largely responsible for the notoriety it was to attain among later generations of Sufis. I have translated Makki's version of the poem below, retaining as much of the literal sense of the Arabic original as possible.

> I love you with two loves, a passionate love
> And a love of which only you are worthy.

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[169] Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 503

[170] Ibid, 502

[171] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 94

[172] Ibid. See the discussion of these individuals in Chapter 1 above.

[173] See Kalabadhi, *al-Ta'arruf*, 80 and Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, 103.

As for the passionate love,
It has preoccupied me with remembrance of you beyond all else.

But as for the love of which only you are worthy,
You part the veils so that I can see you.

No praise is mine for either one or the other,
But all praise is yours for both the one and the other.[174]

The Poem of the Two Loves has appeared in many different versions over the past one thousand years, with some versions differing significantly from others. A *Google* Internet search of the phrase, "The Poem of the Two Loves by Rabi'a," yields 36,300 web entries. This is not far behind "Rumi's *Masnavi*," which yields 51,400 web entries. The different versions of the poem go back to the very beginnings of its transmission. For example, in the earliest version, reproduced by Kalabadhi, the second part of the third verse reads, "I do not see the world of existence unless I see you" (*fa-lastu ara al-kawna hatta araka*). In Makki's version, however, this line reads, "You part the veils so that I can see you" (*fa-kashfuka li-l-hujubi hatta araka*). Although these two passages seem to convey a similar meaning, their theological implications are different.[175] Kalabadhi's "I do not see the world of existence unless I see you," conveys a pantheistic theology because the mystic sees God in the world of existence. In other words, the mystic either sees the world through God or she sees God in everything. This perspective is problematical for the strict monotheism of Islam, where God and the world are ontologically separate. By contrast, Makki's version is more ambiguous and is thus theologically safer. "You part the veils so that I can see you," may mean nothing more than, "You have cleared my mind so that I can perceive you." The theological problem of Kalabadhi's pantheistic version of the poem has been a point of contention throughout Islamic history. As late as 2005, it was discussed as the subject of a *fatwa* by the Qatar Mufti Yusuf al-Qaradawi.[176]

Although the Poem of the Two Loves is important to Kalabadhi's discussion of the concept of Love, he does not attribute it to Rabi'a or to any other woman, but presents it anonymously. Kalabadhi tends to avoid the mention of women, whether Sufi or otherwise, in the text of *al-Ta'arruf*. In fact, Rabi'a is the only Sufi woman whom he mentions by name. Rather than to Rabi'a, he gives the last word on the subject of Love to a man, a certain Ibn 'Abd al-Samad, who also recites two poems of his own about Love. These poems, in effect, obscure the voice of the author of the Poem of the Two Loves, whoever she (or he) may be. To borrow the title of a famous article on the representation of women in late antiquity by Elizabeth A. Clark, in Kalabadhi's treatment of the Poem of the Two Loves, "the lady vanishes."[177] Although we cannot know why Kalabadhi did not attribute this poem to Rabi'a as Makki did, his low opinion

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[174] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, 94

[175] See the discussion of this point in R. Cornell, "Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyyah," 294-95.

[176] For the text of Qaradawi's *fatwa*, see http://www.ghrib.net/vb/archive/index.php/t-12042.html (*Islam Light*).

[177] See Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *Church History* 67 (1998), 1-31.

of women is apparent, because elsewhere in *al-Ta'arruf* he depicts women as deficient in both intellect and religion.[178]

The main reason for the popularity of the Poem of the Two Loves in the English-speaking world is the prominent treatment that Margaret Smith gives to it in *Rabi'a the Mystic*.[179] In 1935, only seven years after the publication of *Rabi'a the Mystic*, the British Orientalist A. J. Arberry cited "Miss M. Smith's" book on Rabi'a in connection with the Poem of the Two Loves in his translation of Kalabadhi's *al-Ta'arruf*.[180] Ironically, Arberry obscures Smith's voice in a way that parallels Kalabadhi's failure to acknowledge Rabi'a or any other woman as the author of this poem. Rather than reproducing what he calls Smith's "literal" translation of the poem, Arberry instead uses what he calls the more "excellent version" of his teacher, the male Orientalist Reynold A. Nicholson. Further compounding the problem, by using Nicholson's translation instead of Smith's, Arberry chooses a version of the Poem of the Two Loves that takes liberties with both Kalabadhi's and Makki's original Arabic texts. Instead of following either version of the poem closely, R. A. Nicholson shapes his translation to fit his stereotypical image of Victorian-era poetry. Thus, in the version of the poem that appears in Arberry's translation of *al-Ta'arruf*, not just one but two ladies vanish. Both Rabi'a and Margaret Smith, without whom the Poem of the Two Loves would not have been known in the West, lose their voices as the author and translator of the poem respectively and are exiled to a footnote in order to make room for the voice of Professor Nicholson, a famous male authority on Sufism. This curious state of affairs makes the reference to "selfish love" in Nicholson's version of the poem seem particularly ironic.

> Two ways I love Thee; selfishly,
> And next, as worthy is of Thee.
>
> 'Tis selfish love that I do naught
> Save think on Thee with every thought;
>
> 'Tis purest love when Thou dost raise
> The veil to my adoring gaze.
>
> Not mind the praise in that or this,
> Thine is the praise in both, I wis.[181]

To be fair to Arberry, however, the tendency to indulge in scholarly fancies with regard to Rabi'a is not his problem alone. Margaret Smith's own discussion of the Poem of the Two Loves in *Rabi'a the Mystic* is similarly full of what Hayden White has called "the fictions of

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[178] Kalabadhi, *al-Ta'arruf*, 80 and Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, 103; Kalabadhi's depiction of women's deficiency in intellect and religion can be seen in *al-Ta'arruf*, 53 and *Doctrine*, 68-69. Although he does not consider women to be deficient in their essence, they still fall short of men in practice. See also R. Cornell, Introduction to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 15-17.

[179] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 126-33 and (Rainbow Bridge), 102-10

[180] Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, 103 n. 1

[181] Ibid, 103

factual representation."[182] First, Smith links Rabi'a's recitation of the poem to a scenario that allegedly appears in Sulami's Book of Sufi Women. The problem with this claim is that Sulami does not cite the Poem of the Two Loves in this work. In fact, Margaret Smith never saw a copy of Sulami's Book of Sufi Women because it was not discovered until after her death.[183] Second, Smith incorrectly reads Makki in *Qut al-qulub* as stating that the four male transmitters of the poem were also its authors.[184] Third, she misinterprets Makki's exegesis of the Poem of the Two Loves, paraphrasing it in literalistic and anthropomorphic terms that are not present in the original text. This is consistent with Smith's attempt throughout *Rabi'a the Mystic* to draw parallels between Rabi'a's mysticism and Christian mysticism, which makes use of anthropomorphic symbolism much more frequently than does Islamic mysticism.

The question of authorship for the Poem of the Two Loves continued from the time of Kalabadhi and Makki throughout the premodern period of Islam. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), who drew heavily on Makki's *Qut al-qulub* when writing his masterwork *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), attributes the poem to Rabi'a and makes it an important part of his discussion of the knowledge of God in the chapter, "Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment" (Book 36 of the *Ihya'*). In this chapter, he chooses not to refer to the intimate knowledge of God by using the Sufi term "taste" (*dhawq*). Instead, he refers to intimate knowledge as a form of "pleasure" (*ladhdha*), which more closely corresponds to the language of Plato's *Symposium*.[185] In addition, he interprets the "passionate love" to which the Poem of the Two Loves refers as a love that is bestowed as a result of God's goodness, blessings, and protection. As for the "love of which only [God] is worthy," this refers to Rabi'a's love for God in God's theological attributes of Beauty (*jamal*) and Glory (*jalal*).[186] Ghazali's view of mystical union as a form of communion with divine beauty also recalls the place in Plato's *Symposium* where Diotima says to Socrates, "Do you not see in that in communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities? For he has hold not of an image, but of a reality; and bringing forth and educating true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may."[187] To translate this passage into Sufi terms, one need only substitute the word "heart" for "mind." As for Diotima's "friend of God," this concept can also be applied to the Sufi saint, who is similarly called a "friend" or "intimate" of God (*wali Allah*).

Sufi or Sufi-influenced writers after Ghazali who attributed the Poem of the Two Loves to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya typically followed a Ghazalian approach to mysticism and thus tended to

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[182] See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 121-34. Smith's frequent use of poetic metaphors (not to say "poetic license") in her book *Rabi'a the Mystic* provides an excellent illustration of White's thesis.

[183] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 125 and (Rainbow Bridge), 102; Smith assumes incorrectly that the Book of Sufi Women was a lost portion of Sulami's *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*. Mahmud Muhammad al-Tanahi first discovered Sulami's Book of Sufi Women in 1991 in the Muhammad ibn Saud University library in Saudi Arabia. It was first published in Arabic in 1993. See Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *Dhikr al-niswa al-muta'abbidat al-Sufiyyat*, edited by Mahmud Muhammad al-Tanahi (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1993).

[184] Ibid, (Oneworld), 125-6 and (Rainbow Bridge), 102

[185] For an English translation of this passage, see Eric Ormsby's translation in Ghazali, *Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment*, 51-55.

[186] Ghazali, *Ihya'*, vol. 4, 310-311 and Ghazali-Ormsby, *Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment*, 52

[187] Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 503

reproduce his gloss on Makki's trope of Rabi'a the Lover. For example, the Andalusian vizier and essayist Lisan al-Din ibn al-Khatib (d. 1374 CE) paraphrases Ghazali's comments and agrees with him in attributing the poem to Rabi'a in his treatise on Love, *Rawdat al-ta'rif bi-l-hubb al-sharif* (The Garden of Knowledge of the Noble Love). However, Ibn al-Khatib reproduces only the first verse of the poem, thus retaining the Platonic trope of two loves but removing its mystical contents.[188] By contrast, the full poem including Ghazali's comments were reproduced by the Yemeni Sufi Muhammad Murtada al-Zabidi (d. 1790 CE) in his famous commentary on Ghazali's *Ihya'*.[189] In this work, Zabidi not only summarizes both Makki's and Ghazali's discussions of the poem but also includes other tropological elements, such as the reputed proposals of marriage by 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd and the Governor of Basra.

From these and other examples, we can conclude that the attribution of the Poem of the Two Loves to Rabi'a in the premodern period followed a distinct pattern. Most of those who saw Rabi'a as the author of the poem followed the approach of Ghazali, who learned of the poem and its attribution from Makki in *Qut al-qulub*. In the modern period, Margaret Smith reproduced this chain of transmission in *Rabi'a the Mystic* and popularized the Poem of the Two Loves as Rabi'a's on this basis.

However, as we have already seen, another Sufi tradition exists that does not attribute the poem to Rabi'a. Unlike the Ghazalian tradition, this alternate tradition does not seem to have a single origin, although here too a distinct pattern of transmission appears. If Kalabadhi was this tradition's ultimate source, it is not mentioned in the works that follow *al-Ta'arruf* in denying authorship of the Poem of the Two Loves to Rabi'a. For example, in *'Uqala' al-majanin*, Nisaburi, writing only a few decades after Kalabadhi and in the same region of Khurasan, cites as his source for this poem the famous Sufi theologian of Baghdad, Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910 CE). In what is supposed to be a verbatim account, Junayd states that the Poem of the Two Loves was composed by a male *shaykh* that he met in a hospital in Egypt. We are not told whether the term *shaykh* refers to an old man, a Sufi master, or a scholar in general. However, it is clear that the hospital in this account is an asylum for the insane. In medieval Islam passionate love, whether of the physical or the spiritual kind, was often associated with mental illness. As in Ghazali's version, the account reproduced by Nisaburi also reveals the strong influence of Platonic Love theory, in that the more rational of the two loves is prompted by a vision of the good:

> I entered a hospital (*dar al-marda*) in Egypt and saw a *shaykh* who said to me, "What is your name?" "Junayd," I replied. "Are you Iraqi?" he asked. "Yes," I said. "Are you one of the Folk of Love (*min ahl al-mahabba*)?" he asked. "Yes," I said. "Then what is Love (*al-hubb*)?" he asked. "Privileging the Beloved over all else (*ithar al-mahbub 'ala ma siwahu*)," I answered. He said, "Love is two loves; a love that has a cause and a love has no cause. As for the love that has a cause, it is the vision of the good (*ru'yat al-ihsan*). As for the love that has no cause, it is because [Love] is made to be loved in and of itself (*fa-li-annahu ahlun li-an yuhabb*)." Then he recited:
>
> I love you with two loves, a passionate love

[188] Lisan al-Din Ibn al-Khatib, *Rawdat al-ta'rif bi-l-hubb al-sharif*, ed. 'Abd al-Qadir Ahmad 'Ata (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, n. d.), 427

[189] See the selections from Zabidi, *Ithaf al-sadat al-muttaqin fi sharh Ihya' 'ulum al-din* in Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 119-21.

And a love of which only you are worthy.

As for the passionate love,
It is a love that preoccupies me with you beyond all else.

But as for the love of which only you are worthy,
I do not see life (*fa-lastu ara al-'aysh*) unless I see you.

Despite that without which there is no life for me,
All praise is yours in both the one and the other.[190]

Besides its attribution to Junayd, Nisaburi's version of the Poem of the Two Loves differs significantly from earlier versions because the non-rational form of Love has more to do with what Michael Dols termed "the romantic fool" than with Sufi love mysticism. Although spiritual love is not ruled out in this version, the story as a whole conforms to Arabic and Persian literary traditions about profane love. This can be observed in the third verse of the poem, which reads, "I do not see life unless I see you." A similar statement is made in the fourth verse: "Despite that without which there is no life for me/ All praise is yours in both the one and the other." The metaphor of finding and losing one's life in love recalls *Layla and Majnun*, the classic story of the romantic fool in Arabic literature. Although the story of Majnun's "mad" love for Layla was used by Sufis to refer metaphorically to the mystic's love of God, it was equally popular among non-Sufis and it is still often cited in non-religious contexts.

In his study *Majnun: the Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, Michael Dols traces the trope of the romantic fool in Islamic literature as far back as the mid-ninth century CE. He notes that this trope drew from a combination of Arab cultural notions of passionate love and the writings of Greek authorities such as Plato, Ptolemy, and Galen.[191] Plato's influence on Nisaburi's account is apparent in the Egyptian shaykh's definition of the love that has a cause as "the vision of the good." This is similar to Diotima's definition of Love in the *Symposium* as "the love of the everlasting possession of the good."[192] For Diotima as for the Egyptian shaykh, love of the good is a lesser form of Love, not the greatest Love, which leads to the knowledge of divine beauty. Although Nisaburi's story of the Poem of the Two Loves is attributed to the Sufi Junayd, there is nothing particularly "Sufi" about the meaning of the poem itself. Rather, it is more reminiscent of non-religious discussions of Love-as-passion and thus belongs to a different genre of Arab or Islamic literature.

Another version of the Poem of the Two Loves also provides a background story that is traced to Egypt but draws on tropes that are found in Christian hagiographies. This version appears in *Masari' al-'ushshaq* (Battlefields of the Lovers), by Ja'far ibn Ahmad al-Sarraj of Baghdad (d. 1106 CE).[193] This collection of anecdotes about Love as desire combines both religious and non-religious genres of literature. In this sense, it is comparable to Ibn al-Khatib's

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[190] Nisaburi, *"Uqala' al-majanin"*, 173

[191] Dols, *Majnun*, 313-19

[192] Plato, *Symposium*, in Jowett, vol. 1, 503

[193] See the reference to this work in Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, 9-10. See also, Mustafa 'Abd al-Wahid, *Dirasat al-hubb fi-l-adab al-'arabi* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1972), vol. 2, 311-408.

Rawdat al-ta'rif, which also discusses both sacred and profane views of Love.[194] As in *'Uqala' al-majanin*, Sarraj traces the origin of the Poem of the Two Loves to a famous early Sufi. In this case, however, the Sufi is Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri ("The Egyptian," d. 859 CE), a figure who is well known in Sufi literature, both for his mystical doctrines and for his encounters with Sufi women.[195] However, most of the women that Dhu'l-Nun meets are unnamed, and thus must be considered as literary tropes. Such is the case for the reputed author of the Poem of the Two Loves, who is an unnamed woman ascetic that Dhu'l-Nun meets on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

> One day I was walking along the edge of the sea when I saw a slave woman (*jariya*) wearing garments of hair; she was emaciated and had a withered appearance. I drew close to her to hear what she was saying and saw that she was overcome with sadness and grief. Suddenly, a wind blew up and roiled the waves, so that some fish appeared. The woman screamed and fell to the ground. When she awoke, she cried out weeping and said: "My Lord! Through you the Near Ones attain intimacy in their places of retreat; for the sake of your greatness the fish swim in the swelling sea; for the sake of the glory of your holiness the pounding waves crash on the shore. You are the one before whom the dark of night, the light of day, the encircling sphere, the swelling sea, the shining moon, and the glistening stars prostrate themselves. Everything has its appointed measure, because you are the Most High, the All-Conquering!"[196]

After saying these words, the woman on the beach recites not one but two poems about Love. The second of these poems is the Poem of the Two Loves. Sarraj's version of this poem is much the same as Makki's, except that the phrase "passionate love" (*hubb al-hawa*) in Makki's version is replaced by "affectionate love" (*hubb al-widad*) in this later version. In both versions, the moral of the poem is to differentiate a greater form of love from a lesser form of love. However, in *Masari' al-'ushshaq* the lesser form of love is not passion but affection. Sarraj's account ends with the observation that after reciting the poem, the woman "hiccupped and then left the world" (*thuma shahiqat shahqatan fa-idha hiya faraqat al-dunya*). While Dhu'l-Nun stands awestruck over the woman's body on the beach, a group of women appear and prepare her for burial. At the end of the story, Dhu'l-Nun leads the women in a funeral prayer.[197]

The tropes in this account of the Poem of the Two Loves are reminiscent of the "fools for Christ" stories of early Christianity. When a woman appears in these Christian stories, she is most often an ascetic and a penitent, a former sinner who has renounced the World for the love of God. A number of such stories appeared in the seventh century CE and became widely popular in the Middle East.[198] One of the most famous of these stories was the legend of Pelagia of Antioch.

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[194] While Bell (Ibid) recognizes the influence of *Masari' al-'ushshaq* on Hanbali writers such as Ibn al-Jawzi, he considers it haphazardly organized and ignores both its Sufi content and its use of chains of transmission for its anecdotes. While some of these chains of transmission may be spurious, the possibility remains that they could provide important new information on a number of Sufi traditions.

[195] See, for example, R. Cornell Introduction to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 15-16.

[196] al-Sarraj, *Masari' al-'ushshaq*, vol. 1, 274

[197] Ibid, 275

[198] Patricia Cox Miller, "Is There a Harlot in This Text? Hagiography and the Grotesque," in Dale B. Martin and Patricia Cox Miller, *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography* (Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 88; the *Lives* of Mary

The description of the woman's hair shirt and emaciated body in Sarraj's account of Dhu'l-Nun recalls a passage in the *Life of Pelagia* where a character named James the Deacon states, "The joints of her holy bones, all fleshless, were visible beneath her skin through emaciation brought on by ascetic practices. Indeed the whole complexion of her body was coarse and dark like sackcloth, as the result of her strenuous penance."[199] The all-consuming love of God of the woman on the beach also brings to mind stories of other Christian women ascetics such as Shirin of Iraq. It was said of Shirin: "Despising the whole world out of love for God and considering it as mere refuse, in order to gain Christ she rejected and pushed aside everything else, attaching herself totally to him with a love that was without any guile as she lived out the perfect life of asceticism in all its rigor."[200]

The depiction of the woman on the beach as a female slave is also a trope that appears in Christian writings on asceticism. As Dale B. Martin states in his book *Slavery as Salvation*, the metaphor of slavery conveys a dual meaning. First, it symbolizes the ascetic's former enslavement to worldly passions; then the ascetic transforms her passions through acts of self-denial into a new form of "liberated" slavery in the service of God.[201] Once the female fool for Christ is "discovered" by a male observer, she dies and is prepared for burial. This too happens in Sarraj's Dhu'l-Nun account when a group of women suddenly appears in order to bury their holy sister.[202]

A century after the publication of *Masari' al-'ushshaq*, a somewhat revised version of Sarraj's story appeared in *al-Kawkab al-durri fi manaqib Dhi'l-Nun al-Misri* (The Glistening Sphere in the Exploits of Dhu'l-Nun the Egyptian) by the Andalusian Sufi Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 CE). This little-known work of hagiography, which was translated into French by Roger Deladrière in 1988, was written by Ibn 'Arabi as a testimonial to Dhu'l-Nun, whom he viewed as one of the founders of his approach to Sufism. In Ibn 'Arabi's version of the story, Dhu'l-Nun and a male companion meet what they believe to be a male ascetic in the "desert of the Israelites" (*tih Bani Isra'il*). After discovering that the ascetic is in fact a woman, a lively exchange ensues, at the end of which the woman defines Love in the following way: "For me, Love is a beginning and an attainment. Its beginning is when the heart is fervently given over to the remembrance of the Beloved; it consists of a constant sadness and an ardent desire without end. When [the lovers] attain the summit of Love, and are put to the test in their solitude [with the Beloved], they are released from most acts of obedience."[203] As in Sarraj's version of the story, the woman

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of Egypt and Pelagia of Antioch in particular were translated into several languages and were well known in the early Islamic Middle East.

[199] Sebastian Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, editors and translators, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1987), 60

[200] Ibid, 179

[201] See Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: the Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven, Connecticut and London: Yale University Press, 1990). See also, R. Cornell's Introduction to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 54-8. In this latter work, I discuss what I call the "theology of servitude," which is shared by early Christian accounts of lovers of Christ and Muslim lovers of God.

[202] This trope can be seen in several of the *Lives* recounted in Brock and Harvey, *Women of the Syrian Orient*. In the story of Mary of Egypt, a lion appears to help the monk Zosimas bury the woman saint. See also Miller, "Is There a Harlot in This Text?" 89.

[203] Ibn 'Arabi, *La Vie merveilleuse de Dhu-l-Nun l'Égyptien*, Roger Deladrière, trans. (Paris: Éditions Sindbad, 1988), 256-8; Ibn 'Arabi seems to indicate in a note that follows this story that the anecdote

collapses and dies after reciting the Poem of the Two Loves. However, the version of the Poem of the Two Loves that is reproduced by Ibn 'Arabi is not that of Sarraj, but of Makki.

Ibn 'Arabi's version of the story appears once again in the fourteenth century in the hagiographical anthology *al-Rawd al-fa'iq* (The Garden of Awareness) by the Egyptian Sufi Sa'id al-Hurayfish.[204] Hurayfish's version is identical to Ibn 'Arabi's up to the point where the woman ascetic defines Love for Dhu'l-Nun. This part of the story, which is central to Ibn 'Arabi's version, is left out by Hurayfish, probably because of its suggestion that the enraptured lover of God can ignore the Shari'a. Another difference between these versions is in the Poem of the Two Loves itself. For some reason, Hurayfish eliminates the reference to two loves in the first verse while retaining the suggestion of two loves in the remainder of the poem.

Hurayfish's version of the Poem of the Two Loves also differs from other versions because he rearranges the verses in a way that transgresses the original poem's poetic style. For example, he changes the first verse of the poem to read, "Your love is the Beloved of the Folk of Passion/ and a love for which only you are worthy." In addition, he changes the middle of the poem to describe the lesser form of Love as a form of remembrance (*dhikr*) that preoccupies the lover with the Beloved to the exclusion of all else. This creates some confusion as to the poem's ultimate meaning because remembrance, which Plato associates with the higher form of Love, is now associated with the lower form of love. Finally, at the end of the poem Hurayfish adds two additional verses, most likely of his own composition: "Oh Beloved of the Heart, I have nothing without you/ So have mercy today on the sinner who comes to you. Oh my hope, my solace, and my happiness/ My heart has refused everything but you." Although Hurayfish does not explicitly claim that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya composed the Poem of the Two Loves, this is strongly implied by its inclusion in the section on Rabi'a in *al-Rawd al-fa'iq* and by the fact that the woman who is depicted as composing the poem does not die after she recites it to Dhu'l-Nun.

b. *The Poem of the Intimate Gift*

The second famous poem on Love that has been attributed to Rabi'a was originally attributed not to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya of Basra but to Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Damascus, the wife of the Sufi Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari.[205] Ibn Abi al-Hawari was a disciple of Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d. 830 CE), a famous early Sufi who was originally from Basra but moved to Daraya, a village near Damascus.[206] Ibn Abi al-Hawari was also from Basra and moved to Syria with his teacher. Upon their arrival in Syria, Darani, a celibate who normally forbade his disciples from marrying, allowed Ibn Abi al-Hawari to marry Rabi'a bint Isma'il, a rich Sufi widow who was the

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originated with Ibn al-Jawzi. However, it is not contained in *Sifat al-safwa*, Ibn al-Jawzi's major work on hagiography. Whether or not it can be found in another of his works, I cannot say with certainty.

[204] Hurayfish, *al-Rawd al-fa'iq*, 183

[205] Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari also transmitted traditions about Christian ascetics. He may have been responsible for disseminating Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's teachings about love mysticism in Syria and the Levant after he moved from Basra to Damascus. For information on Ibn Abi al-Hawari, see Sulami, *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*, 98-102, Isfahani, *Hilya'* vol. 10, 5-33, Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 836-7, and Massignon, *Essay*, 152-8.

[206] For information on Abu Sulayman al-Darani, see Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, 76-77, Massignon, *Essay*, 152-4, Sulami, *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*, 75-82, Isfahani, *Hilya'*, vol. 9, 254-80, and Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 828-34.

disciple of Hukayma of Damascus.[207] Hukayma was Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's near contemporary and seems to have played a similar role to that of Rabi'a as a wisdom teacher in Syria. According to the short notice on her in Sulami's Book of Sufi Women, she taught a path of asceticism, celibacy, and devotion to God that was very similar to Rabi'a's. Sulami even refers to her as *ustadh*, the masculine Arabic term for "teacher." This unusual term is equivalent in many ways to the term *mu'addiba*, by which Sufyan al-Thawri referred to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.[208]

Because of the similarities in their names, accounts about Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Syria are frequently mistaken for accounts about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya of Basra. In fact, in many accounts Rabi'a of Basra's name is given as "Rabi'a bint Isma'il."[209] As early as the tenth century CE, Abu Talib al-Makki highlighted the separate existence of these two Rabi'as by saying of Rabi'a bint Isma'il, "Her excellence among the people of Syria is comparable to that of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya among the people of Basra."[210] Rabi'a bint Isma'il's marriage to Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari may have been the source of mistaken reports about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's marriage, as claimed by Hurayfish, 'Abd al-Raziq, and others. Likewise, accounts of Rabi'a's widowhood may have been due to the fact that Makki describes Rabi'a bint Isma'il as a widow.[211] As noted earlier in this chapter, one of the most significant features of Rabi'a bint Isma'il's asceticism was her adherence to the Syrian Christian practice of pseudo-marriage, in which she and Ibn Abi al-Hawari lived not as husband and wife, but rather as "brother" and "sister." This practice is reported by Ibn al-Jawzi in *Sifat al-safwa*. Ibn al-Jawzi also attributes the Poem of the Intimate Gift to Rabi'a bint Isma'il. The information transmitted by Ibn al-Jawzi on Rabi'a bint Isma'il comes from two main sources: Sulami's Book of Sufi Women and a now lost work by Abu Bakr ibn Abi al-Dunya (d. 894 CE). Ibn Abi al-Dunya was a noted traditionist and teacher of the Abbasid Caliph al-Muktafi Billah (r. 902-8 CE). He is said to have composed several works on Muslim ascetics. It is apparently through the lost work of Ibn Abi al-Dunya that we learn from Ibn al-Jawzi that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and Rabi'a bint Isma'il were confused with each other as early as the second half of the ninth century CE.[212] It may also have been through Ibn Abi al-Dunya that the "Poem of the Intimate Gift" was first attributed to Rabi'a bint Isma'il.

After the Poem of the Two Loves, the Poem of the Intimate Gift is the most famous poem that has been attributed to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Unlike the Poem of the Two Loves, whose text varies from version to version, this poem tends to appear in a standardized version that hardly ever varies. For example, in the recently published *Diwan Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* by Muwaffaq

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[207] According to Abu Talib al-Makki, Rabi'a bint Isma'il donated her former husband's inheritance of 300,000 gold dinars to Abu Sulayman al-Darani and his followers. This was why Darani allowed Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari to marry her. See Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 413. Ibn al-Jawzi, who utilized an earlier source for his information, puts Rabi'a bint Isma'il's fortune at the lower but still significant figure of 7,000 silver dirhams. See Ibn al-Jawzi Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 316-17.

[208] See the discussion in Chapter 1 and Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 126-27. The fact that the term *ustadh* appears in the masculine form indicates that Hukayma attained the status of a "man" in her wisdom.

[209] Ibn al-Jawzi claims that Sulami said that the fathers of both Rabi'a's were named Isma'il. This claim does not appear, however, in Sulami's Book of Sufi Women. See R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 138-41 and Ibn al-Jawzi Appendix, 314-15.

[210] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 413

[211] Ibid

[212] This can be inferred from Ibn Abi al-Dunya's careful specification of their names. See the comment in Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa* Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 314-15.

Fawzi al-Jabr (1999) as well as in the popularized biography *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* by Muhammad 'Atiyya Khamis (1955) one finds the same version of the poem that appears in Ibn al-Jawzi's twelfth-century *Sifat al-safwa*.

> I have made you the one who speaks to me in the depths of my soul,
> But I made my body lawful for the one who desires to be with me.
>
> My body is my intimate gift to my worldly companion,
> But my heart's beloved is my true intimate in the depths of my soul.[213]

The main difference between modern versions of the Poem of the Intimate Gift and that of Ibn al-Jawzi is that modern accounts attribute the poem to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya of Basra whereas Ibn al-Jawzi attributes the poem to Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Damascus. As noted above, Ibn al-Jawzi may have derived this attribution from Ibn Abi al-Dunya. However, if the poem was attributed to Rabi'a bint Isma'il at such an early date, why have so many writers attributed it to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya? What might have been the source for the attribution of this poem to the wrong Rabi'a? Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami mentions both Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and Rabi'a bint Isma'il in his Book of Sufi Women but attributes no poetry to either of them. However, a likely source for the confusion between the two Rabi'as can be found in a work that was nearly contemporary with Sulami's Book of Sufi Women and was written in the same city of Nishapur. This work is *Tahdhib al-asrar* (The Primer of Secrets) by 'Abd al-Malik al-Kharkushi (d. 1016 CE). Kharkushi was an important Sufi of Nishapur who appears to have been a rival of Sulami.[214] At present, *Tahdhib al-asrar* is the earliest extant source for the Poem of the Intimate Gift, in that it predates Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa* by nearly two centuries. In his chapter on the Sufi doctrine of intimacy (*uns*), Kharkushi states: "Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari said: Rabi'a used to experience many spiritual states (*ahwal*). Sometimes Love (*hubb*) overcame her; sometimes Intimacy (*uns*) overcame her; sometimes Fear (*khawf*) overcame her." The reader is not told which Rabi'a is meant in this passage. The report then goes on to cite three poems by Rabi'a, one for each of the three states mentioned by Ibn Abi al-Hawari. The Poem of the Intimate Gift is Rabi'a's poem for the state of intimacy.[215]

It is easy to imagine how a reader who was unfamiliar with the biographies of Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari and Rabi'a bint Isma'il might mistake Kharkushi's account about an unspecified Rabi'a as referring to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. In fact, it has long been common for Sufi authors to attribute any unspecified reference to a Sufi woman named Rabi'a to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. A similar attribution of the Poem of the Intimate Gift to an unspecified Rabi'a appears in the well-known treatise *'Awarif al-ma'arif* (The Ways of Discernment) by Abu Hafs 'Umar al-Suhrawardi

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[213] Appendix to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 316-317 and Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 871-872; see also, Muwaffaq Fawzi al-Jabr, *Diwan Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya wa akhbaruha* (Damascus: Dar Ma'd and Dar al-Namir, 1999), 57, 78-9 and Muhammad 'Atiyya Khamis, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (Cairo: Dar Karam, 1955), 62.

[214] The rivalry between Kharkushi and Sulami can be inferred from the similarity of their teachings and their use of the same sources, as well as by the fact that only Sulami's father but not Sulami himself is mentioned in *Tahdhib al-asrar*.

[215] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*, 80

(d. 1234 CE).[216] Suhrawardi was head of the Sufis of Baghdad and was an ambassador and advisor for the Abbasid caliph al-Nasir (d. 1225 CE).[217] Because of his influence on the development of orthodox mystical doctrines in Islam, *'Awarif al-ma'arif* was often attached as an appendix to Ghazali's *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*. Like Kharkushi, Suhrawardi gives no indication that the Rabi'a who composed the Poem of the Intimate Gift was anyone other than Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Thus, the uninformed reader is led to conclude that Rabi'a of Basra wrote this poem rather than anyone else. Because of the wide popularity of *'Awarif al-ma'arif* throughout the Islamic world, it is reasonable to suppose that this work was another source for the misattribution of the Poem of the Intimate Gift to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.

However, the misattribution of the Poem of the Intimate Gift to the wrong Rabi'a reveals more than just a simple case of mistaken identity. It also illustrates the uncritical attitude toward tradition that has characterized Sufi literature for centuries. Upon careful consideration of the text of the Poem of the Intimate Gift, it makes little sense to attribute it to Rabi'a of Basra. The second line of the poem, "I made my body lawful for the one who desires to be with me," alludes to an experience of sexuality that is alien to the figure of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as she appears in early Sufi literature. We have already seen in this chapter how the earliest accounts of Rabi'a agree about her celibacy and her practice of an ascetic devotionalism that left no room for anyone but God. The third line of the poem, "My body is my intimate gift to my worldly companion," confirms that the author of this poem most likely had a worldly companion and that she was intimate with him. In contrast, early Sufi traditions concur that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's only close companions were other Sufi women such as herself.

Clearly, the only Rabi'a whose life story provides a fitting background for the Poem of the Intimate Gift is Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Damascus. If Makki and Ibn al-Jawzi are correct, the Syrian Rabi'a did in fact have a male companion for whom she made her body lawful. This was her first husband, whose inheritance she gave to Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari. Significantly, Ibn Abi al-Hawari is the source for the Poem of the Intimate Gift in Kharkushi's *Tahdhib al-asrar*. Perhaps relying on this same source, Ibn al-Jawzi depicts Rabi'a bint Isma'il as unsure about how to balance her obligations to her husband and her obligations to God. According to Ibn al-Jawzi, she eventually tries to resolve this conflict by encouraging her second husband to take another wife so that she could maintain their pseudo-marriage. A similar sense of conflict is expressed in the Poem of the Intimate Gift. The author of this poem allows her body to be possessed by her worldly companion; however, only God, her "true intimate," has the right to possess her heart. The appeal of this poem for many generations of Sufis, both male and female, is that it eloquently expresses the dilemma of the devotee who struggles to give the proper measure of devotion both to God and to a worldly partner at the same time. How is a Sufi woman to give herself completely to both God and her husband without creating what the Qur'an refers to as "two hearts in one body"?

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[216] See, for example, Abu Hafs 'Umar al-Suhrawardi, *'Awarif al-ma'arif*, appended to various editions of Ghazali, *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*. The attribution of The Poem of the Intimate Gift to an unspecified "Rabi'a" appears in Chapter 61, *Dhikr al-ahwal wa sharhiha* (Mention of the Spiritual States and Their Explanation).
[217] On Abu Hafs 'Umar al-Suhrawardi and his influence on Sufi doctrine, see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 244-47.

CHAPTER 4

RABI'A THE SUFI

"Verily, the Knower of God (*'arif*) asks God to grant him a heart. So [God] grants it to him from Himself. When he possesses the heart, he then offers it back to his Lord and Master, so that in [God's] repossession of it he will be protected and will be veiled in its concealment from created beings."
— Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*

"The fruit of true knowledge (*ma'rifa*) is constant orientation toward God (*iqbal*)."
— Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar* and in Sulami, *Dhikr al-niswa al-muta'abbidat al-sufiyyat*

I. THE LADY RECONSIDERED: CAN WE SEE THE REAL "RABI'A THE SUFI"?

In her influential article, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,'" Elizabeth A. Clark uses the concept of the social logic of historical and hagiographical texts to argue that literary depictions of women saints exhibit a "reality effect" that gives them an aura of truthfulness that is sometimes not deserved.[1] Hayden White has similarly observed that the authors of historical works are often more concerned with the moral of the story than with the details of the story, and for this reason they may endow certain events or depictions with special symbolic or ideological significance.[2] A similar phenomenon occurs when Muslim writers of hagiography construct the iconic image of a saint such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. As Clark states in her article, "Readers are thus led to ascribe considerable truth to the account because so many 'effects of the real' have been summoned up."[3] This notion of the "reality effect" is similar to the concept of "narrative validity" mentioned in the Introduction to this study. The mutual reinforcement of the story elements of a master narrative and the archetypal characters, relationships, and situations that they invoke all conspire to give the narrative an aura of factuality that may not be objectively "real."

Elizabeth Clark's article is especially relevant to the study of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya because the "reality effect" that she focuses on is the tendency in early Christian hagiography to depict women saints as teachers of wisdom. As we saw in Chapter 1, the trope of Rabi'a the Teacher is a central theme of the Rabi'a narratives. Clark finds a similar example of this trope in Gregory of Nyssa's (d. 395 CE) writings on his sister Macrina. Gregory calls Macrina "my

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[1] Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn'," *Church History*, vol. 67, No 1 (March, 1998), 1-31; the term "reality effect" (*l'effet du réel*) comes from Roland Barthes; the term "social logic" comes from Gabrielle Spiegel, "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 65 (1990), 59-86.
[2] See, for example, Hayden White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation," in idem, *Tropics of Discourse*, 121-134.
[3] Clark, *"The Lady Vanishes,"* 21

teacher," just as Sufyan al-Thawri does for Rabi'a in works such as Sulami's *Book of Sufi Women*. Like Rabi'a as well, Macrina is depicted as being concerned for the human condition and the life of the soul, and her approach to God is based on a theology of Love.[4] Perhaps the most striking similarity between these two figures is in Clark's observation, "Macrina is modeled on Socrates' muse Diotima of the *Symposium*, while her words in the dialogue *On the Soul and the Resurrection* owe much to Plato's *Phaedo*."[5]

As we have seen in the previous chapter, a nearly identical assertion can be made about the trope of Rabi'a the Lover.[6] Clark also suggests that the trope of "Wisdom As A Woman" goes back to the Classical Greek concept of *Sophia*, in which the word for wisdom is feminine, and to *hochmah*, the Hebrew term for wisdom, which is also feminine.[7] Since early Christian literature took examples from both Greco-Roman and Jewish literary cultures, it is not surprising to find that Christian writers would feminize the concept of wisdom just as their predecessors did. According to Clark, women saints such as Macrina were often depicted by early Christian writers as exemplars of a new type of knowledge, in which divinely inspired wisdom replaced a philosophical education. It is in this sense, she states, that the feminist historian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza could characterize early Christian theology by saying, "The earliest Christian theology is sophialogy."[8]

The challenge posed by Clark's article to the historical study of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is that she concludes from the tropological nature of the Wisdom As Woman motif that such representations say little or nothing about the "real" woman behind the story. In her opinion, Gregory's stories of Macrina do not reveal the real Macrina; instead, they reveal Gregory appropriating his sister's voice by "writing as a woman."[9] Following an argument first posed by David Halperin, Clark sees the trope of female wisdom teachers in early Christianity as legitimating the philosophical, theological, or political agendas of their male authors. In other words, the figure of the wise woman provides a tool by means of which men can "think through various troubling intellectual and theological problems that confronted male theologians."[10] Clark thus concludes that female teachers of wisdom such as Gregory's Macrina and Plato's Diotima are not real women at all; rather, they are figural "women." The wise woman is an "inversed alter ego" of the male writer. As a figure of literature, she is a "pseudo-Other:" "an alternate male identity whose constant accessibility to men lends men fullness and totality that enables them to dispense (supposedly) with otherness altogether."[11] If we apply Halperin's and Clark's conclusions to the tropes that describe Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, we again confront the key historiographical problem discussed in the Introduction of the present study: Is there any way to see a "real" person behind the figural representation of a literary icon?

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[4] Ibid, 23

[5] Ibid, 24

[6] I came up with my theory of the parallels between Diotima and Rabi'a independently, before discovering Elizabeth Clark's article.

[7] The same thing, of course, could be said about the Arabic term *hikma*, which is also feminine.

[8] Clark, "The Lady Vanishes," 24

[9] Ibid, 27

[10] Ibid. See also, David M. Halperin, "Why Is Diotima a Woman?" in idem, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 113-151.

[11] Clark, "The Lady Vanishes," 26

It seems to me that the best way to respond to this challenge is to repeat a point that has often been made by Hayden White but is overlooked by many of his readers: Just because works of history and hagiography employ literary tropes and novelistic forms of representation, this does not mean that they are purely fiction.[12] Students of hagiography should not allow the ideal of objectivity to lead them into the blind alley of artificial or overly simplistic "either-or" dichotomies. As Hayden White indicates about history writing in general, the use of tropes and other literary devices does not necessarily mean that everything said about a figure such as Rabi'a or Macrina is untrue. The novelistic form of a narrative does not automatically imply that the content of the narrative is false. Even a trope may have some basis in fact. For example, although the trope of Rabi'a the Lover was developed 200 years after Rabi'a's death by Abu Talib al-Makki, the fact that Muhasibi cited a statement about love by Rabi'a 150 years before Makki can be taken as evidence that the "real" Rabi'a probably did talk about love in her teachings.[13] Even the characters in historical novels are often real people who lived through real events and have sayings that are in the historical record. In such cases, we have to acknowledge that something real exists in the story, even if it is embellished for rhetorical purposes. If this obvious but often overlooked fact is taken sufficiently into account, then the question to be asked of a figural representation such as Rabi'a the Lover is not only whether it contains anything real at its core but also, if such information exists, how does it relate to the content implied by the work's rhetorical form?

Elizabeth Clark bases her argument about the tropological nature of Macrina the Wisdom Teacher on Gregory of Nyssa's reproduction of her statements in formal, classical styles of rhetoric that she could not have learned without an advanced classical education. Since Macrina did not have such an education, Clark concludes that what she supposedly "says" in Gregory's writings are actually Gregory's words and not Macrina's. The same can also be said about many of the statements that have been attributed to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. In the previous chapters, I noted several instances in which Sufi writers made up statements that were supposedly by Rabi'a without reference to any original text. We shall see more examples of this use of authorial license in Chapter 5, "Rabi'a the Icon." However, other accounts about Rabi'a do not show the same evidence of fictional composition. For example, although hagiographers such as the Sufi Sulami and the non-Sufi Ibn al-Jawzi portray Rabi'a in very different ways, both attempt to base their portrayals on what they consider to be documentary evidence. In other words, they saw themselves as traditionists instead of storytellers, and their different portrayals of Rabi'a were matters of representation rather than of fiction.

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[12] In "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," Hayden White reminds us that history and fiction start from different premises: "What distinguishes 'historical' from 'fictional' stories is first and foremost their content, rather than their form. The content of historical stories is real events, events that really happened, rather than imaginary events, events invented by the narrator . . . The form of the discourse, the narrative, adds nothing to the content of the representation; rather, it is a simulacrum of the structure and process of real events. And insofar as this representation resembles the events that it represents, it can be taken as a true account. The story told in the narrative is a mimesis of the story lived in some region of historical reality, and insofar as it is an accurate imitation, it is to be considered a truthful account thereof." Idem, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 27

[13] As noted in Chapter 1, Muhasibi reports in his treatise *al-Qasd wa-l-ruju' ila Allah* that Rabi'a would say at the coming of night, "The night has come, the darkness has mingled, and every lover is left alone with his beloved. Now I am alone with you, my Beloved."

Although it is true that many accounts about Rabi'a— like those about Macrina— are due to men "thinking through various troubling intellectual and theological problems," we should not automatically dismiss all of the accounts about her as factually unreliable. Doing so would amount to committing the type of category mistake that critical historiography was supposed to avoid. In other words, just because we cannot prove that an account is true does not mean that it is false. When Makki created the trope of Rabi'a the Lover to illustrate his theory of love mysticism, he was indeed "a man writing a woman," just as Gregory of Nyssa wrote the trope of Macrina the Wisdom Teacher. However, because earlier writers cited statements on love by Rabi'a much earlier than Makki, this suggests that the trope of Rabi'a the Lover may have been based on "real" evidence, even if Makki's representation of Rabi'a went beyond the evidence itself. The same process of tropological construction continues today. The only difference is that newer additions to the trope of Rabi'a the Lover are based on the contributions of 'Attar, Maqdisi, Hurayfish, and other Sufi writers who built on the theme that Makki developed. For this reason, when assessing reports about Rabi'a in premodern literature, it is important to distinguish between the earliest accounts of her sayings and later narratives that were designed to make a theoretical point (like Makki's) or embellished these accounts to create a fictional life story (like 'Attar's).

As stated in the Introduction and Chapter 1, I believe that historiographically, the best approach is to view the earliest accounts about Rabi'a and other major figures from the formative period of Sufism as products of historical and cultural memory. Because famous ascetics like Rabi'a made their local communities noteworthy, many of their statements and acts were preserved through oral tradition, which entered Sufi literature through later use by traditionists and doctrinal specialists. Despite Elizabeth Clark's useful warning about the unreliability of tropological and gendered discourses, one should not automatically assume that just because a man writes about a woman, the woman herself cannot be seen. Although Rabi'a's female gender may have played a role in her portrayal as a teacher of Love instead of other aspects of Sufi doctrine, it would be a mistake to draw the conclusion that Abu Talib al-Makki made Rabi'a into a love mystic primarily because she was a woman. Feminist theory on the politics of gender and representation is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it correctly warns women historians not to allow our interest in creating a hermeneutic of remembrance ("the lady must not vanish") to blind us to the fact that what seem to be women's voices are sometimes not women's voices at all.[14] On the other hand, we must ask ourselves: Is it truly liberating for us to assume that premodern women were always destined to be the mouthpieces of men?

The premise of the present chapter is that the earliest traditions about Rabi'a contain important information on her actual doctrines and teachings. When I first began this study I assumed that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was entirely a narrative construct. I did not expect to find an actual person behind the myth. However, I now regard the Rabi'a narrative as it has developed over the centuries as something like a historical novel produced by a writer's collective. Evidence suggests that a real woman from eighth-century Basra lies at the heart of the story but the saint and Sufi constructed by the authors of her narrative is a significantly different person from the original. Over time, the figure of Rabi'a the ascetic and teacher of Basra found in the earliest accounts has achieved mythical and universal status through the tropes of Rabi'a the

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[14] For a more detailed discussion of the concept of "hermeneutic of remembrance" and its application to Sufi *tabaqat* literature, see R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 48-53

Lover, Rabi'a the Sufi, and (as we shall see in Chapter 5) Rabi'a the Icon. However, despite the authorial license that has taken place, a distinct individual still emerges from the Rabi'a narrative. Although the present study is primarily concerned with the rhetorical and tropological representations of Rabi'a in Sufi literature, this is not to deny the possibility that a "real" Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya actually did teach, did practice asceticism, and did develop a mystical doctrine that was based (at least in part) on the love of God. In historiographical terms, to assume that Rabi'a was nothing but a myth would be to deny the very possibility of using tradition as a source for history.

The present chapter will bring the historical Rabi'a back into the narrative by tracing the outlines of the figure of Rabi'a the Sufi in early Sufi literature. The central question of the chapter is: What does it mean to say that Rabi'a was a Sufi? Surprisingly, despite Rabi'a's widespread fame as a figure of Sufism, this question is difficult to answer. Even Margaret Smith could not provide an answer in her book *Rabi'a the Mystic*. For example, her chapter on Sufi doctrine is not about Rabi'a's Sufism, but instead is a general introduction to Sufism that depends for the most part on later Sufi doctrines.[15] In subsequent chapters of her book, Smith merely cuts and pastes accounts of Rabi'a's statements using definitions of Sufism formulated by Sufi theorists who lived centuries after her. Of the five key tropes of the Rabi'a narrative that are examined in the present study, only Rabi'a the Lover and Rabi'a the Ascetic receive significant attention in *Rabi'a the Mystic*.

Smith's tendency to discuss Rabi'a's Sufism anachronistically in light of later doctrines is not unique. Most medieval Muslim hagiographers and almost everyone who has written about Rabi'a after Smith have done the same thing. For this reason, we must first ask the question, "What did it mean to say that someone was a 'Sufi' in Rabi'a's time?" This question is important because many of the traditions of Sufism that we know today did not develop until a generation or more after Rabi'a's death. Most contemporary scholars of Sufism agree that one cannot speak meaningfully about Sufism as an institution until the mid-ninth century CE. Although the term, "Sufi," was used in Rabi'a's time, contemporaneous references to the term are both rare and contradictory. In fact, we need to ask: Was the "real" Rabi'a even a Sufi at all?

In answering this question, I shall argue that the essential asceticism of Rabi'a and her contemporaries marked an important transition between the ascetic pietism of the eighth century CE and early Sufism as it developed in the ninth century CE. As we saw in Chapter 3, the concept of essential asceticism was central to the development of Islamic Love mysticism. The connection between essential asceticism and love is apparent in some of the earliest accounts of Rabi'a's teachings. This is why I stated at the end of Chapter 2 that whereas the trope of Rabi'a the Teacher depends in part on the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic, the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic finds its fullest expression in the trope of Rabi'a the Lover. In a similar way, the trope of Rabi'a the Lover leads to the trope of Rabi'a the Sufi.

The key to these connections can be found in the fact that asceticism, love mysticism, and Sufism are all ways of knowledge. On the path toward the knowledge of God that begins with asceticism, the servant-devotee is led by her devotion to become a lover of God. At this point,

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[15] See Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 71-76 and (Rainbow Bridge), 47-52. Instead of using Rabi'a's own statements, Smith uses quotations from the later Sufis Makki (d. 996 CE), Munawi (d. 1621 CE), Abu Sa'id Abu al-Khayr (d. 1041 CE), Rumi (d. 1273 CE), Mahmud al-Shabistari (d. 1320 CE), modern Orientalists such as R. A. Nicholson and E. J. W. Gibb, and even an early Christian mystic.

she is also an essential ascetic because all of her spiritual practices are focused on the object of her devotion. Because she no longer has instrumental goals, her asceticism changes from renunciation of the World to detachment from it. She now realizes that any involvement with the World— even to renounce it— is a distraction from God. The reorientation of the ascetic's spiritual focus from denial of the World to absorption in God is expressed through the rhetoric of Love mysticism.   As a result, the ascetic takes on a new identity as God's intimate and becomes a "knower" of God (*'arif bi-llah*). In a famous aphorism, Rabi'a describes this state as follows: "The fruit of true knowledge (*ma'rifa*) is constant orientation toward God (*iqbal*)." In this aphorism, the word *iqbal* connotes both the orientation of the essential ascetic toward God and God's response to her orientation. In the language of Love mysticism, both lover and Beloved are present for each other. This is the meaning of Rabi'a's comment on Jesus' saying from the Sermon on the Mount: "Knock and the door will be opened." "The door is already open." she says, "But the question is, who wishes to enter it?"[16]   The wisdom of knowing that the door to God is always open comes from the intimate knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) that is the goal of the essential ascetic and love mystic. It is a special form of knowledge that goes beyond the external knowledge (*'ilm*) provided by religious laws or dogmas.

In Sufi doctrine, knowledge, love, and wisdom come together in the heart. However, Rabi'a and her contemporaries were not the first to use the concept of the heart in this way. As we shall see, the metaphor of the heart was used in similar ways in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an. Already before the coming of Islam, the heart had become a favorite metaphor for Christian mystics, who adapted the biblical metaphor of the heart to the philosophical doctrines of Plato and the Neo-Platonists. Early Muslim ascetics in Iraq and Syria adapted their use of this metaphor in part from these previous models. A deeper understanding of the heart appears to have developed among Muslim ascetics in Rabi'a's time. This can be seen in the fact that only a generation or so after her death Sufis from Basra, Baghdad, and Syria began to construct sophisticated and elaborate doctrines of the inner life of the soul based on the metaphor of the heart. For example, al-Harith al-Muhasibi, who was born and raised like Rabi'a in Basra, defined Sufism as "the science of hearts."

For Rabi'a and other essential ascetics of her generation, attaining knowledge of God depended on the "turning" or reorienting of the heart away from the World. This concept is expressed in Islam by the term *tawba*, which is the Arabic word for repentance, but literally means "turning." As we saw in Chapter 2, *metanoia*, the Greek term for repentance used by pagan philosophers and early Christian mystics, also means "turning." In both *tawba* and *metanoia*, two acts of turning are involved: the renunciant turns away from the World and turns toward God as the source of knowledge and truth. This dual act of turning is expressed in the first statement of Rabi'a in the epigraph to this chapter: "Verily, the Knower of God (*'arif*) asks God to grant him a heart. So [God] grants it to him from Himself. When he possesses the heart, he then offers it back to his Lord and Master, so that in [God's] repossession of it he will be protected, and will be veiled in its concealment from created beings." According to this statement, the knowledge that Sufism embodies depends on the mutual turning of God and the mystic toward each other. When Rabi'a offers her heart back to her Lord, this act of devotion expresses the ethic of essential asceticism because nothing in the world has value other than God.

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[16] See Chapter 1 and Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 80.

It also expresses an ethic of love because the heart, as a symbol of the self, is "turned over" as a gift to the Beloved.

II. LOCATING RABI'A THE SUFI: WHAT WAS A "SUFI" IN EIGHTH-CENTURY ISLAM?

Nowhere in the study of Islam is the search for origins more full of difficulty than in the search for the original meaning of the term "Sufi." Etymological theories of the origin of the term do not provide a clear answer. One theory states that the term "Sufi" originally referred to ascetics that wore woolen (*suf*) garments; another claims that it referred to religious devotees who patterned their lifestyle after the "people of the porch" (*ahl al-suffa*), early Muslim ascetics who prayed and invoked God at the Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina; other theories claim that it referred to those who followed a path of moral and ethical purity (*safa*), or that it referred to those who patterned their spirituality on the Greek philosophical concept of wisdom (Gr. *sophia*). Not only have Western writers advanced such theories but they can also be found in premodern Muslim works as well, both inside and outside of the Sufi tradition.[17] Even the *sophia-sufiyya* etymology, which many contemporary Muslims assume to have been the creation of Western Orientalists, was first thought up by a Muslim: its origin can be traced at least as far back as Abu Rayhan al-Biruni's (d. 1048 CE) *Kitab al-Hind* (Book of India).[18]

Modern attempts to clarify the meaning of the term "Sufi" by relying on simplified or generalized definitions have also been of little help. For example, Annermarie Schimmel defines early Sufism in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (1975) as follows: "Sufism meant, in the formative period, mainly an interiorization of Islam, a personal experience of the central mystery of Islam, that of *tawhid*, 'to declare that God is One.'"[19] Among the problems with this statement is that it relies on a theological definition of Sufism that came relatively late in the formative period of Sufism— the beginning of the tenth century CE.[20] One might also add that the term "Sufism" is itself originally a Western concept, being a translation of the Arabic word *tasawwuf*, and that it has its own problematic genealogy.[21] It will become clear in the following pages that Schimmel's

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[17] The British Orientalist R. A. Nicholson claimed to have found 78 etymologies for the term "Sufi" in Muslim sources. See Massignon, *Essay*, 106.

[18] According to Biruni, the term "Sufi" was derived from a misunderstanding of the Greek word *sophia*, which Muslims linked etymologically to the Arabic terms *suf* and *al-suffa*, mentioned above. See Ainslee Embree, ed., *Alberuni's India*, Edward C. Sachau trans. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1971), 33-4.

[19] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 17

[20] The notion that Islam involves the internalization of *tawhid* as a mystical experience first appears in Sufi writings about a century after Rabi'a's death. It is most commonly associated with the figure of Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910 CE), who is often credited with being the first Sufi theologian. It can also be found in the doctrines of Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896 CE), a resident of Basra whose teachings influenced Abu Talib al-Makki. In his writings Tustari speaks of mystical encounter with God as a recompense for the internalization of *tawhid*. See Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustari (d. 283/896)* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 172-5.

[21] For a good introduction to the genealogy of the concept "Sufism," see Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston and London: Shambhala Books, 1997), 1-31, especially the section, "The Orientalist 'Discovery' of Sufism," 8-17. It is also important to note that the term *tasawwuf*, which in Arabic literally means "doing *suf*" or "practicing wooliness," is meaningless when taken out of the context of Sufism as a doctrine or institution.

notion that Sufism involves the interiorization of the theological concept of *tawhid* is not supported by the earliest references to the term "Sufi" in Islamic sources. Although her theological definition of Sufism is generally true today, when applied to the origins of Sufism it is a claim to be argued, not assumed *a priori*.

Among the earliest extant treatises on Sufism, Abu Nasr al-Sarraj's (d. 988 CE) *Kitab al-luma'* is the most explicit in affirming the problematic genealogy of the term "Sufi." After a section that details some of the etymologies of the term mentioned above, Sarraj adds another section titled, "Refutation of one who says that we have not heard mention of [the term] *al-Sufiyya* in the past because it is a neologism" (*al-Radd 'ala man qala lam nasma' bi-dhikri al-sufiyya fi-l-qadim wa huwwa ism muhdath*).[22] The presence of this discussion in *Kitab al-luma'* proves that the authenticity of Sufism was called into question very early in its history. Sarraj acknowledges that the term *al-sufiyya* did not exist in the first two generations of Islam. However, he maintains that the practice of *tasawwuf* is dependent on the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad, his Companions, and their Successors. As for *al-sufiyya* being a neologism, he says that some people claim that this term was first coined in Baghdad. This probably refers to the Baghdad school of Sufism associated with Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910 CE) and his circle. Sarraj refutes this assertion by claiming that the early theologian al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 726 CE) once reported seeing a "Sufi" at the Ka'ba in Mecca. When he tried to give the man some money, the "Sufi" refused the gift, saying, "I have four *dawaniq* (3/4 of a dirham) with me and this is sufficient."[23]

This story is important because chronologically it indicates that early systematizers of Sufism such as Sarraj dated the origins of the term "Sufi" to the eighth century CE, the same period in which Rabi'a lived. In addition, Sarraj associates the earliest Sufis with an ascetic life-style, which, as we have seen, is also well established for Rabi'a. This indirect connection to Rabi'a is further confirmed by Sarraj when he cites a tradition in which Rabi'a's student Sufyan al-Thawri states, "Were it not for Abu Hashim the Sufi, I would not have learned about the subtle effects of egoism (*daqiq al-riya'*)."[24] This tradition tells us that Sarraj associated early Sufism with ethical and moral training. This recalls Rabi'a's pedagogy of *ta'dib*, which formed the basis of the trope of Rabi'a the Teacher discussed in Chapter 1.

Sarraj's mention of a figure called Abu Hashim "al-Sufi" (d. ca. 776 CE) identifies one of the earliest ascetics in Islam to refer to himself as a Sufi. The same person also appears in Jahiz's treatise *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin*, which was written nearly 150 years before Sarraj's *Kitab al-luma'*. In Jahiz's book, Abu Hashim is mentioned along with other Sufis named Kilab, Kulayb, Hashim al-Awqas, and Salih ibn 'Abd al-Jalil.[25] Jahiz, who was not a Sufi himself, refers to these individuals as ascetic ritualists (*nussak*) and includes them in his book because of the eloquence

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[22] Sarraj, *The Kirab al-Luma'*, Arabic text 21-22

[23] Ibid, 22

[24] Ibid; Sarraj also reports that before the Prophet Muhammad began to preach Islam, a person known as a "Sufi" once came in from the desert to visit Mecca outside of the normal pilgrimage season; he performed the ritual of circumambulating the Ka'ba and then went back into the desert. This pattern of behavior recalls a common trope in the stories of early Christian anchorites. By recording this story Sarraj seems to suggest that before Islam the term *Sufi* was regarded as a synonym for *Hanif* (unaffiliated monotheist).

[25] Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 1, 195

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of their speech.[26] In Chapter 1 it was noted that Jahiz regarded Rabi'a the same way, although he did not call her a Sufi. Louis Massignon claims, without attribution, that Abu Hashim was the first person in Islam to refer to himself as a Sufi.[27] Other information on Abu Hashim can be found in the hagiographical anthology *Hilyat al-awliya'* (The Ornament of the Saints) by Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani (d. 1037 CE). The main sources for Isfahani are two of the earliest hagiographical works on ascetics in Islam: *Kitab al-ruhban* by Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Burjulani (d. 852 CE) and *Tabaqat al-nussak* by Abu Sa'id ibn al-A'rabi (952-3 CE).[28]

Abu Hashim appears under two separate headings in *Hilyat al-awliya'*, which indicates that Isfahani was not sure whether both sets of accounts referred to the same person. In neither entry, however, is he called "Abu Hashim al-Sufi." In one notice, which is based in part on Ibn al-A'rabi's *Tabaqat al-nussak*, he appears as "Abu Hashim Fadim." In the other notice, which is based on Burjulani's earlier *Kitab al-ruhban*, he appears as "Abu Hashim al-Zahid" (the Ascetic or Renunciant). As an early Muslim ascetic, Abu Hashim was a firm believer in the World/Nonworld dichotomy discussed in Chapter 2. This is clearly visible in the following statement, which originally came from Burjulani's work: "God Most High has characterized the World as desolate (*inna Allaha wasama al-dunya bi-l-wahsha*) so that those who seek Him will find solace in its opposite and that those who find satisfaction in Him will reject it. Thus, those who know God are alienated [from the World] and are desirous of the Hereafter (*fa-ahl al-ma'rifa bi-llah fi-ha mutawahhishun wa ila al-akhira mushtaqun*).[29] Abu Hashim is also reported to have said, "If the World is all palaces and gardens and the Hereafter is nothing but caves, the Hereafter would still be more desirable than the World because of its permanence compared with the impermanence of the other."[30] Apart from their affirmation of the World/Nonworld dichotomy, what is most significant about these statements is Abu Hashim's use of the term *ahl al-ma'rifa bi-llah*, which literally means, "The Folk of the Knowledge of God." Evidence suggests that in Rabi'a's day this appellation referred to the Sufis. As we shall see later on in this chapter, the concept of *ma'rifa* was associated with Sufis and Proto-Sufis, as opposed to other kinds of ascetics, in early Islam.

In the entry on "Abu Hashim Fadim," Isfahani states that Abu Hashim was noted for ascetic ritualism (*nusk*) and for having been an expert in Sufi practice (*al-tahqiq bi-l-tasawwuf*).[31] This is as close as Isfahani comes to calling him a Sufi. He also confirms that Abu Hashim knew Sufyan al-Thawri by quoting a variant of Sarraj's account in which Thawri credits Abu Hashim with instructing him on the subject of egoism.[32] Isfahani also relates a story in which Abu Hashim sees an ascetic who served as a judge being taken away from the house of the Abbasid vizier Yahya al-Barmaki after having been arrested and beaten. Upon observing this scene, he

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[26] Ibid, 194

[27] Massignon, *Essay*, 105; Massignon reports that Abu Hashim was born in Kufa. Kufa was also the home of his contemporaries Sufyan al-Thawri, Fudayl ibn 'Iyad, and Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna (see Chapter 1). Perhaps for this reason Massignon also assumes that Kufa was the place where the term "Sufi" was first used.

[28] Both of these works are discussed in Chapter 1.

[29] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 10, 225

[30] Ibid

[31] Ibid, 112

[32] In the entry based on Burjulani's *Kitab al-ruhban*, Abu Hashim also states, "Cutting a mountain in two with a needle is easier than emptying hearts of vanity" [Ibid, 225].

exclaims, "I seek refuge in God from a knowledge that bequeaths this [type of treatment], and destines the one who possesses it to be seen the way I see him!"[33] The rhetorical style of this anecdote brings to mind some of Rabi'a observations on ethics discussed in Chapter 1. As a trope, it illustrates the rejection of worldly power and responsibility that was associated with the ascetic practice of ethical precaution (*wara'*). By Isfahani's time, the rejection of government service by the Piety-Minded had become a common theme of Islamic hagiography.[34]

The emphasis on ethical precaution in Isfahani's notices on Abu Hashim al-Sufi closely resembles al-Harith al-Muhasibi's view of the earliest Sufis in *Kitab al-makasib* (The Book of Outcomes). This treatise, which was written nearly two centuries before *Hilyat al-awliya'* but only a generation or so after Rabi'a's death, is one of the earliest works to mention the Sufis as a distinct group.[35] In this work, Muhasibi uses two different terms for the Sufis: *al-sufiyyin*, the plural of "Sufi," and *al-mutasawwifa*, literally "practitioners of *tasawwuf*." This latter term signifies that something resembling formal Sufi doctrine had already been conceptualized by the first half of the ninth century CE. Although Rabi'a is not mentioned in *Kitab al-makasib*, Muhasibi does mention Sufyan al-Thawri as a Sufi. For Muhasibi the term "Sufi" referred primarily to renunciants and ascetic ritualists (*zuhhad* and *nussak*) who specialized in ethical precaution. In fact, *Kitab al-makasib* was written as a treatise on ethical precaution and references to the Sufis mostly appear in the chapter titled, "Schools of Ethical Precaution among the Predecessors" (*Madhahib al-salaf fi-l-wara'*).[36] A key characteristic of the Sufis as described in this chapter is the pursuit of both outward and inward purity. This suggests that Muhasibi was more inclined to link the etymology of the term "Sufi" to *safa*, the Arabic word for purity, than to *suf*, the Arabic word for wool.

In *Kitab al-makasib* Muhasibi discusses three types of *wara'* that correspond closely to the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions: (1) a purely social form of *wara'* that entails avoiding all discussion of other people and their affairs; (2) a more symbolic form of *wara'* that requires the ascetic to avoid everything that is not unambiguously licit or illicit (*halal* or *haram*) or about which there is moral or ethical doubt; (3) a more subtle form of *wara'* that is based on the following hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: "You will not be among the truly God-fearing until you leave aside everything in which there is no harm, out of fear of the harm that may be in it."[37] Those who adhered to one or more of these rules, says Muhasibi, were a small number of religious scholars, specialists in Hadith, devotees of the Qur'an, and the Sufis. He also notes that some sects (*tawa'if*) in the city of Basra made the avoidance of morally doubtful things (option 2 above) the basis of their asceticism.

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[33] Ibid, 112; Isfahani also attributes a variant of this account with a different final statement to Burjulani: "I seek refuge in You [God], from a knowledge that is of no benefit" [Ibid, 225]. Yahya al-Barmaki rose to prominence under the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdi, who ascended the throne in 775 CE, just one year before Abu Hashim's purported death in 776 CE (Massignon, *Essay*, 105).

[34] This can also be seen in another reference to the word "Sufi" by Sufyan al-Thawri, which appears in Qushayri's *Risala*: "I heard Abu Sa'id ibn al-A'rabi saying: 'I was informed that Sufyan Thawri said: Five species of creatures are the rarest: a scholar who is an ascetic, a Sufi who knows the law (*faqih Sufi*), a rich man who is humble, and a descendant of the Prophet who is a Sunni (*sharif sunni*)." Qushayri, *al-Risala*, 148

[35] For a discussion of this work, see Chapter 2 above.

[36] Muhasibi, *Kitab al-makasib*, 205-12

[37] Ibid, 205

Because Muhasibi does not mention Rabi'a in this work, it is not possible to determine which of these doctrines she followed. However, most of the Sufis that he identifies followed the third, tradition-based form of *wara'*; this corresponds to what the theologian Abu Hamid Ghazali would later refer to as "the renunciation of the permissible" (*al-zuhd fi-l-halal*).[38] Muhasibi particularly liked this form of ethical precaution because it forbade mendicant begging. In *al-Makasib* he associates begging, of which he strongly disapproves, with Rabi'a's eastern contemporary Shaqiq al-Balkhi, who apparently learned this practice from Buddhist monks (see Chapter 1).[39] In fact, much of *al-Makasib* concerns the renunciation of actions such as begging that are ethically questionable but not legally forbidden. Muhasibi refers to this practice as "avoiding that in which there is no explicit harm" (*tark ma la ba's bi-hi*).

Although Muhasibi does not provide a definition of Sufism in *Kitab al-makasib*, it is clear from his references to those he calls "Sufis" that he considers the term equivalent to "The Pure Ones." This can be seen both in his criticism and in his approval of certain Sufi practices. For example, he criticizes as "great ignorance and error" the refusal of some Sufis to take alms if this could be understood as profiting the recipient in any way. The obvious point of his criticism is that such Sufis considered themselves too pure to accept help from others.[40]

Muhasibi's portrayal of the earliest Sufis as advocates of ethical purity fits the image of another figure who is often identified as one of this group, Salih ibn 'Abd al-Jalil. Although there is no clear death date for this individual, traditions make him a contemporary of the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi, who ruled from 775-785 CE. This would make Salih a contemporary both of Abu Hashim al-Sufi and of Rabi'a, who, as we saw in Chapter 1, acted as Sufyan al-Thawri's mentor during the first three years of al-Mahdi's reign. In fact, an account in Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa* depicts Salih as visiting Rabi'a, although the lack of a chain of transmission makes it impossible to use this tradition as a historical source.[41] In *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, Louis Massignon mentions a group of "Shiite Sufiyya" from Kufa, who included the figures Kilab and Kulayb. These same individuals are identified as Sufis by Jahiz along with Abu Hashim al-Sufi and Salih ibn 'Abd al-Jalil.[42] In *Kitab al-bayan wa al-tabyin* Jahiz reproduces an address by Salih to the Caliph al-Mahdi. This quotation is worth repeating in full because some of the terminology in the address recalls Massignon's hypothesis about the existence of a group of "Shiite Sufiyya."

> Salih ibn 'Abd al-Jalil came to see the Caliph al-Mahdi and asked him if he could be allowed to speak. "Speak, " al-Mahdi said. Salih said: "Since access to you has been made much easier for us than it has been for others, I will take this opportunity to speak

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[38] Ibid, 205-6; see also, Ghazali, *Ihya'*, vol. 4, 229 (Kitab al-faqr wa al-zuhd); Ghazali attributes the origin of this concept to Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 778 or 790 CE), who also appears prominently in *al-Makasib*, although he is not mentioned as a Sufi. Ghazali's approach to Sufism was strongly influenced by Muhasibi's ethics. For a discussion of this influence, see Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, 269-91.

[39] According to Muhasibi, Shaqiq al-Balkhi taught that striving to earn a living was forbidden (*haram*) for ascetics because it implied a lack of trust in God. See idem, *al-Makasib*, 194-9.

[40] Ibid, 207

[41] See Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa* in Sulami, *Early Sufi Women* 278-9.

[42] Massignon, *Essay*, 116; According to Massignon, Kulayb is said to have written a book called *Kitab al-mahabba wa-l-waza'if* (Book of Love and Invocations). According to Ibn al-Jawzi (*Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 3, 381), Kilab was one of the "weepers" (*bakka'un*) of Basra. He is said to have accompanied Salih on the visit to Rabi'a cited above.

on their behalf as well as on behalf of the Prophet. This is by virtue of the burden around our necks that requires us to command the good and forbid evil, and because the excuse of concealing the truth (*taqiyya*) no longer applies to us, and especially because you seem to be a person of humble demeanor and have vowed to God and those who bear His word that you will privilege the truth over everything else. You and I have been brought together in this inquest in order to fulfill what we have promised God we would deliver. We are bound to accept the consequences of our promise; otherwise, God will look into our inner and outer intentions and see that we are clothed in garments made of lies. The Prophet's Companions used to say: 'When God conceals His knowledge from someone, such a person is tortured by ignorance.' However, an even worse torture is reserved for one who is given the opportunity to take knowledge from God, but turns his back on it. When God grants knowledge to a person and he neglects to put what he has been given to use, he has indeed ignored God's gift to him and has belittled it. Therefore, accept the gift that God has given you through our speech truly and sincerely, but not as an excuse to boost your vanity and promote your reputation. Rest assured that we will not condemn you for what you do not know, and that we will not belittle what you do know or remind you of what you have forgotten. For God granted the Prophet peace and security in the face of what befell him, and protected him from overstepping the limit, for He always shows the way to every exit. God said: 'If [at any time] an incitement to discord is made to you by the evil one, seek refuge in God, for He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing' (Qur'an, 41:36). So let God be the watcher over your heart so that by means of it other hearts may be enlightened through your privileging of the truth and disavowing the passions. If you do not do this it will not only result in your actions being exposed as a failure, but it will also reveal the effects of God's command on you as well. There is no strength and no power other than through God!"[43]

Because Jahiz does not give background information for this anecdote, it is not clear whether Salih had been brought to al-Mahdi's inquest under duress or came of his own accord. However, the very fact that he appeared before a formal tribunal, along with his reference to *taqiyya*— a practice associated with Shiism in which one conceals one's true beliefs out of fear of harm to oneself or one's family— supports the possibility that he was one of the "Shiite Sufiyya" mentioned by Massignon.

In *Hilyat al-awliya'*, Isfahani portrays Salih ibn 'Abd al-Jalil as a person who was not afraid to speak truth to power. He quotes him as saying, "The people of insight (*ahl al-basa'ir*) look upon the kings of the World disparagingly, whereas the folk of the World look upon them adoringly and with awe."[44] Unlike Jahiz, however, Isfahani does not call Salih a Sufi; rather, he characterizes him as one who has a "taste" for obedience to God (*al-mustaladh bi-l-ta'a*) and adds that he was noted for his unquestioning acceptance of God's will (*tawakkul*). He also states that a group called "God's Obedient Ones" (*al-muti'un li-llah*) were to be found in Iraq at this time. Might these have been Massignon's "Shiite Sufiyya"? In support of this conjecture, the following statement by Salih might be understood to mean that he was a member of this group: "God's Obedient Ones have lost their taste for both the life of the World and the Hereafter. God will say to them on the Day of Judgment, 'I have caused you to suffer for my sake in the World on account of your desires and have made this known to you today. By my glory, I created the Heavenly Garden (*al-jinan*) only for you!'"[45]

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[43] Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, vol. 2, 222-3

[44] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 8, 317; this statement also recalls Marshall Hodgson's concept of a self-styled group of the Piety-Minded (see Chapters 1 and 2).

[45] Ibid

The notion that God's Obedient Ones have lost their taste for both the World and the Hereafter because of their love for God recalls two of the most famous statements attributed to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. In the earlier of the two, which appears in Makki's *Qut al-qulub*, she says: "I do not worship God out of fear of God. If I did, I would be like the disobedient slave-girl who only works when she is afraid. Nor [do I worship God] out of a love for heaven. If I did, I would be like the disobedient slave-girl who only works when she is given something. Instead, I worship God out of love for him alone and out of yearning for him."[46] In an even more famous statement, which first appears in 'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, Rabi'a says: "Oh Lord, if I worship you out of fear of Hell, burn me in Hell. If I worship you in the hope of Heaven, forbid it to me. But if I worship you for your own sake, do not deprive me of your eternal beauty."[47] Because neither of these statements appears in the earliest sources about Rabi'a, it is impossible to determine if she really said them. However, they reflect the essential asceticism and devotionalism that characterized the practices of the earliest Sufis in Abbasid Iraq.

Although early references to Sufis are scattered and inconsistent in Muslim sources, the meaning of the term seemed to have revolved around a common and identifiable set of spiritual attitudes and practices. Because of this, one can use the most authenticated accounts in the works of Muhasibi, Jahiz, Isfahani, and other early Sufi and non-Sufi writers to draw a rough outline of what I shall call "Proto-Sufism" in Rabi'a's time. This set of beliefs and practices formed the basis for what would become the more theologically oriented Sufism of the tenth and eleventh centuries CE. A summary of these beliefs and practices is reproduced below:

1. The earliest Sufis were ascetics, whose worldview was defined by the World/Nonworld Dichotomy.
2. The earliest Sufis conceived of their spiritual path primarily as the pursuit of outward and inward purity.
3. Because their path was based more on practice than on theology, many but not all of them, were also practitioners of ascetic ritualism (*nusk*).
4. The internalization of ascetic practices by the earliest Sufis was expressed as essential asceticism and sometimes as Love mysticism.
5. The social practices of the earliest Sufis were characterized by a strongly moralistic asceticism (*wara'*), which was integrated into a highly disciplined regime of moral and spiritual training (*ta'dib*).
6. Their practice of ethical precaution (*wara'*) led many of the earliest Sufis to criticize the pursuit of worldly gain, although most do not appear to have been political dissidents.

When seen in light of the above considerations, the earliest traditions about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya lead to the conclusion that even if she was not called a Sufi in the sources that mention her, she should at least be considered a Proto-Sufi. The trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic conforms closely to the beliefs and practices summarized above. This suggests that Proto-Sufism did not depend on the interiorization of theology, as Annemarie Schimmel supposed; rather, it depended on the interiorization of ascetic practice. This focus on practice over theory is reflected

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[46] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 94
[47] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 74; see also, Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 169.

in one of the earliest accounts of Rabi'a's sayings, which appears in Jahiz's *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin*. In this account Rabi'a is asked, "Have you ever performed any action (*'amal*) that you knew would be accepted by God?" She replies, "If there were anything, it would be my fear that my works would be held against me."[48] To repeat a major argument of Chapter 2, Rabi'a's asceticism can be termed "essential" because it involves the interiorization of ascetic attitudes and practices. In essential asceticism, renunciation of the World is transcended and ascetic practice is interiorized because the ascetic has reached the ultimate goal of asceticism: to attain what Walter O. Kaelber described in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* as "a more thorough absorption in the sacred."

When it is viewed from the perspective of essential asceticism, the goal of the ascetic is much the same as that of the mystic. Once the ascetic self has been absorbed into the sacred, there is no more need to conceive of asceticism as renunciation because the World has lost all importance. All that matters is God. This attitude is reflected in Rabi'a's statement that her asceticism entailed "leaving aside all that does not concern me and cleaving to the One that always is."[49] Besides defining her essential asceticism, this statement also illustrates how asceticism is related to the more mystical paths of Love and knowledge. Rabi'a's phrase, "cleaving to the One that always is" expresses the ascetic's devotion to God in terms that reflect the rhetoric of Love mysticism. This statement also alludes to spiritual reorientation, which is central to the concept of Sufism as a path of knowledge. In the next section of this chapter we shall see how for Rabi'a and her fellow Proto-Sufis the heart was conceived as the meeting-place of love and knowledge and as the site where the transformation of natures that is essential to spiritual realization takes place.

III. THE HEART AS A METAPHOR IN EARLY ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

    a. Scriptural Antecedents

In *Kashf al-mahjub* (Unveiling the Veiled), an influential manual of Sufism from the second half of the eleventh century CE, the Persian Sufi 'Ali al-Hujwiri quotes 'Ali al-Isfahani, an associate of the famous Baghdad Sufi and theologian Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910 CE), as saying about the heart: "From the time of Adam to the Resurrection people cry, 'The heart, the heart!' I wish that I might find someone to describe what the heart is or how it is, but I find no one. People in general give the name of 'heart' to that piece of flesh, which belongs to madmen and ecstatics and children, who really are without heart. What, then, is this heart, of which I hear only the name?" Hujwiri explains, "That is to say, if I call intellect the heart, it is not the heart; and if I call spirit the heart, it is not the heart. All the evidences of the Truth subsist in the heart, yet only the name of it is to be found."[50]

The word "heart" (*qalb*) in either its singular or plural form is mentioned 134 times in the Qur'an. It is also used frequently in the Hadith, and since Rabi'a's time it has become one of the most important spiritual metaphors in Sufism. The fact that the Sufi heart is primarily a metaphor, and not an empirical "thing," lies at the root of 'Ali al-Isfahani's frustration in the

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[48] Jahiz, *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin*, vol. 3, 108

[49] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*, 81 and Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 10, 108

[50] Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, 144

quotation from *Kashf al-mahjub*. This is because a metaphor has no single, accurate, or "true" definition. As Hujwiri explains, one can summarize the ways in which the word "heart" is used; however, because it is a metaphor one can never find a single, essential meaning for the concept.

However, the use of the heart as a metaphor is not just a Sufi practice; it is also an important metaphor in the Qur'an. In the Qur'an, the heart is often depicted as the seat of the conscience or of moral and emotional states: it may be haughty and tyrannical (*qalb mutakabbir jabbar*, 40:35); it may be repentant (*qalb munib*, 50:33); it may be hardened (*qasat qulubuhum*, 2:74); it may be diseased (*fi qulubihim marad*, 33:12); it may be anxious or fearful (*fi qulubihim al-ru'b*, 33:26); it may be at peace if it possesses faith (*qalbuhu mutma'inun bi-l-iman*, 16:106). The Qur'an also describes the heart of the Prophet Muhammad as the site of divine revelation, whether through the agency of the angel Gabriel (2:97), or through a being called "The Trustworthy Spirit" (*al-Ruh al-Amin*, 26:194). The heart may be described, like human beings in general, as God-fearing (*taqwa al-qulub*, 22:32); also like the human being, it is capable of recalling God's teachings (*lahum qulubun ya'qiluna biha*, 22:46). Reflecting the negative aspect of humanity, the heart may be blind (22:42) or otherwise veiled from the truth (4:155). Often it is described as the seat of knowledge and understanding: when it fulfills its true nature, it helps the believer understand and respond to God's message (*wa ja'alna 'ala qulubihim akinnatan an yafqahuhu*, 17:45). However, when it goes against its true nature, it cannot understand God's message (*lahum qulubun la yafqahuna biha*, 7:179). Because it is the site of the person's most secret feelings and thoughts (32:51), the heart is predisposed to recall eternal truths (*dhikra li-man lahu qalb*, 50:37). This is because for the believer, as for the Prophet Muhammad, the heart that is purified can become a receptacle for the divine presence: "[God] it is who has revealed His presence to the hearts of the believers (*anzala al-sakinata fi-l-qulub al-mu'minin*), that they may add faith to their faith" (48:4).

In summarizing the metaphor of the heart in the Qur'an, one could say that all of the above descriptions allude to the heart as the place where the ordinary self is united with the transcendent self: it is the place where God "inscribes" faith on the believers and strengthens them with His spirit (*kataba fi qulubihim al-iman wa ayyadahum bi-ruhin minhu*, 58:22). When the Qur'an states, "God did not create two hearts in a man's body" (*ma ja'ala Allahu li-rajulin min qalbayni fi jawfihi*, 33:4), it implies that all notions of a "divided self" are either false or deluded. The true human self is an integral unity, undivided within itself and spiritually united with God.[51]

In most respects, the rhetorical use of the heart in the Qur'an is identical to its use in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. In these earlier scriptures, as in the Qur'an, the heart symbolizes the self and is the site of the deepest thoughts, feelings, and intentions of the human being. In Hebrew, the word "heart" (Heb. *lev*) can refer both empirically to the physical heart in the human breast and metaphorically to the concepts of emotion and understanding.[52] The word

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[51] This interpretation is borne out by the remainder of Qur'an 33:4, which compares the notion of two hearts in one body with other metaphors that were taken as realities by the pagan Arabs, such as the *zihar* divorce, in which a husband's wife is called his "mother" to prevent remarriage and the practice (common in the West today but forbidden in Islam) of calling one's adopted children one's "own;" i.e., children by blood.

[52] *Biblical Hebrew E-Magazine*, November 2004 (http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/emagazine/009.html)

"heart" is used 833 times in the Hebrew Bible.[53] Its most frequent use is in the Book of Psalms, where it appears 125 times in 121 verses. In the Psalms, the heart appears not only as the seat of the emotions, but also as the speaker's alter ego and as a metaphor for the entire personality. In this latter sense, the Hebrew word *lev* is similar in meaning to the Arabic term *lubb* or "kernel," which in Sufi usage denotes the spiritual self or the inner essence of the personality. Thus, it is not surprising to find that virtually all of the metaphors for which the heart is used in the Qur'an can also be found in the Psalms. In the Psalms, just as in the Qur'an, one finds the motif of the unitary heart used as a metaphor for the united self: "Teach me your way, oh Lord; I will walk in your Truth; unite my heart to fear your Name" (Psa. 86:11). Similarly, one can also find in the Psalms a foreshadowing of the later Sufi metaphor in which the heart stands for all aspects of a human personality that includes both body and soul: "My soul longs, even faints for the presence of the Lord, and my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Psa. 84:2).

Just as in the Qur'an, in the Christian New Testament the heart (Gr. *kardia*) is described as something that can think (Mark 2:8), reflect (Luke 2:19), and understand (Matt. 13:15). In addition, the New Testament describes the heart as the seat of the morals and the conscience. When the heart is pure, the believer's morals are pure; when the heart is sullied, the moral life is sullied as well: "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). In Paul's Letter to the Romans one can even find a reference to God inscribing or "writing" on the heart as in the Qur'an: "They show that the work of the Law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them" (Rom. 2:15). Finally, as in the Qur'an as well, Paul describes the heart as the place where the Holy Spirit resides: "He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:27).

b. Possible Paths of Transmission

Around the time of the coming of Islam, Christian mystics in the Middle East began to make metaphorical use of the heart in ways that recall the statements of early Sufis. The ascetic Hesychios of Sinai (fl. late sixth or early seventh century CE) stated, "When the heart has acquired stillness, it will look upon the heights and depths of knowledge, and the intellect, once quieted, will be given to hear wonderful things from God."[54] Similar correspondences with Sufi statements about the heart can be found in the sayings of "Makarios" the Great, an anonymous monk and mystic who lived in Syria sometime between the fourth and sixth centuries CE.[55] Much like Rabi'a's teacher Hayyuna discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, Makarios conceived of the heart as a bridal-chamber where the soul of the ascetic lover of God unites with the divine Beloved. In the following passage, Makarios describes the heart as a place of spiritual transformation where the soul of the perfected or purified believer is enabled to "see" God:

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[53] *Strong's Concordance with Hebrew and Greek Lexicon* (http://www.eliyah.com/lexicon.html)

[54] McGuckin, *Book of Mystical Chapters*, 118-19

[55] Massignon, *Essay*, 39; unlike Tor Andrae and Margaret Smith, Massignon considered most correspondences between Christian and Muslim mystical doctrines and practices to be fortuitous. Although he recognized that a "genealogical kinship" might exist between Christian and Muslim practices, he felt that specific instances had to be proven rather than assumed.

What did the Lord mean when he said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God?" Or again when he said, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect?" Did he not promise to us in these words a state of final purification from all wickedness? And is this not the final setting aside of our ignoble obsessions and our ascent to the perfections of the highest plane of virtues, which is itself the ultimate purification and sanctification of our heart by means of its communion with the divine and perfect spirit of God?"[56]

Of particular relevance to the mystical language of Sufism are the aphorisms of Isaac of Nineveh, a Nestorian Christian monk from Beth Qatreya (modern Qatar) who briefly served as Bishop of Nineveh sometime between the years 660 and 680 CE. The teachings of Isaac are important because he lived through the Muslim conquest of Iraq and flourished under the Rightly Guided Caliphs and the first Umayyads. Often, both the form and content of his lessons and aphorisms are suggestive of Sufi teachings. For Isaac, as it was for Rabi'a and her Proto-Sufi contemporaries, the heart is the locus of the spiritual intellect and the source of wisdom that transcends the limitations of normal thought. The transparency or clarity of the purified heart— *shafyut lebba* in Syriac— was an important subject of discussion for ascetics of the Syrian Christian tradition, both for the Orthodox and for Nestorians like Isaac. For Isaac, the heart that is cleansed of impurities makes visible the forms of divine truths that are obscured by the rational mind and the material world. For this early Christian Neo-Platonist, the heart takes over the place of the head in the Greek philosophical tradition. The head, which contains the rational faculty, is the highest part of the body; however, the heart, as a metaphor for the deepest part of the soul, is more profound and thus "higher" than the head, just as the immortal soul, which is located in the body, is both "deeper" and "higher" than the mortal body. As the following passage from Isaac's *Third Discourse* demonstrates, the depth of the heart allows it— through the mediation of ascetic practices— to protect itself from the impurities that would otherwise affect the soul through the body:

> Of what does the difference between purity of mind and purity of heart consist? Purity of mind is different from purity of heart, just as there is a difference between a member of the body and the whole body. The mind is indeed one of the senses of the soul. But the heart is the ruler of the internal senses; that is, the sense of senses, which is the root. If the root is holy, so also are all the branches. But the root is not holy even if in one of the branches there is holiness. The mind indeed with a little study of the Scriptures and a little labor in fasting and stillness forgets its former musing and is made pure, in that it becomes free from alien habits. The heart, however, is purified with great sufferings and by being deprived of all mingling with the world, together with complete mortification in everything. When it has been purified, however, its purity is not defiled by contact with inconsequential things. That is, it is not afraid of violent battles, for it has a strong stomach which easily digests all foods hard for others who are ill in their abdomens . . . Every purification which is achieved easily, quickly, and with little labor is easily defiled. But the purity acquired with great troubles over a long period and by the highest part of the soul does not fear insignificant contacts with worldly things.[57]

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[56] McGuckin, *Book of Mystical Chapters*, 155-6; St. Makarios also said with respect to the doctrine of Love, "It was God's own desire to have communion with the human soul, and this was why he espoused it to himself as a royal bride and why he purified it from all uncleanliness" (155).

[57] St Isaac of Nineveh, *On Ascetical Life*, Mary Hansbury, trans. (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Monastery Press, 1989), 50-51

As a rhetorical device, the trope of the heart as the ruler of the bodily senses and the seat of the personality goes back to Greek philosophy, where it can be observed, for example, in the works of Plato.[58] In the ascetic tradition of Islam, the use of the heart as a metaphor for the personality has traditionally been traced to al-Hasan al-Basri, from whom it was passed on to later generations by his disciple Malik ibn Dinar (d. 745 CE). Since Ibn Dinar lived in Basra during the time of Rabi'a, it is possible that he was influential in establishing the heart as a metaphor for Rabi'a and her contemporaries. In Chapter 2 it was noted that 'Ubayda bint Abi Kilab, a woman ascetic and weeper from the Basra region, was a disciple of Malik ibn Dinar. Ibn Dinar was also an early teacher of Love mysticism and some later hagiographers, such as Ibn al-Jawzi and 'Attar, suggested that Rabi'a knew him.[59] This is theoretically possible, since their lives overlapped enough for Rabi'a to have encountered Ibn Dinar early in her career. If this were the case, Ibn Dinar would likely have been an important influence on Rabi'a in both her doctrine of Love mysticism and in her use of the heart as a spiritual metaphor. Furthermore, it might also suggest why Sufi legends place Rabi'a anachronistically together with al-Hasan al-Basri more often than with Ibn Dinar, who was her more probable associate. Since Ibn Dinar was reputed to be an exceptionally faithful transmitter of al-Hasan al-Basri's doctrines, it is understandable that traditionists and storytellers would conflate the identity of the lesser-known pupil with his more famous teacher.

The same situation also might explain why some statements that were originally attributed to al-Hasan al-Basri later ended up as "Rabi'a's" statements. For example, in Ibn al-Jawzi's biographical dictionary *Sifat al-safwa*, we are told that Rabi'a said to Sufyan al-Thawri, "You are but a set number of days. When one day goes, a part of you goes as well."[60] Although this aphorism seems to be authentic because its purported transmitter, Abu Sulayman al-Dab'i, is known to have related accounts about Sufyan al-Thawri's encounters with Rabi'a, there is no chain of transmission to support it. This lacuna is important because a century and a half before Ibn al-Jawzi, Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani attributed the same aphorism to al-Hasan al-Basri in *Hilyat al-awliya'*.[61] In this earlier version the reporter of the story is Salih al-Murri, another ascetic who has been linked to Rabi'a. Although Isfahani similarly fails to provide a chain of transmission, his version is corroborated by an even earlier account by Jahiz, who attributed the same aphorism to al-Hasan al-Basri two centuries before Isfahani in *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin*.[62] Because of Jahiz's greater proximity in time to both Rabi'a and Hasan, it is reasonable to conclude that if either one

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[58] In the *Republic*, Plato states, "The good, then, is the end of all endeavor, the object on which every heart is set, whose existence it divines, though it finds it difficult to grasp just what it is; and because it can't handle it with the same assurance as other things it misses any value those other things have." Plato, *The Republic*, Desmond Lee, trans. (London: The Penguin Group, 1955), 230

[59] See, for example, Ibn al-Jawzi in Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 278-9. 'Attar's accounts of meetings between Rabi'a and Ibn Dinar can only be taken as rhetorical constructs. In one account, 'Attar has Ibn Dinar relating a tradition about Rabi'a. This would have been highly improbable, since at the time of his death, Ibn Dinar would have been much more famous than Rabi'a, who was then only in her twenties. In another account, 'Attar has al-Hasan al-Basri, Ibn Dinar, and Shaqiq al-Balkhi all visiting Rabi'a at the same time. In actuality, Balkhi died nine years after Rabi'a and Hasan died when Rabi'a was only eleven years old. Therefore, it would have been impossible for such a cast of characters to assemble at the same time. See Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 167-8.

[60] Ibid. See also, Chapter 2 above.

[61] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 2, 148

[62] Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, 94

of these two figures actually made this statement, it was more likely to have been Hasan than Rabi'a.

Besides providing a possible doctrinal connection between Rabi'a and al-Hasan al-Basri, Malik ibn Dinar is also important because he was a transmitter of aphorisms and wisdom traditions from both Christian and Jewish sources. For example, the section devoted to his memory in Isfahani's *Hilyat al-awliya'* contains numerous references of this kind. The most interesting of these refer to Ibn Dinar "reading" Christian or Jewish texts. In one account he states, "I read in the Torah: 'Oh Son of Adam! Do not be discouraged to stand weeping in my presence while you pray; for I am the God that is close to your heart and through the unseen you saw my light!" [63] In another account he says, "I read this in the Psalms (*al-Zabur*): With the arrogance of the hypocrite the poor person is burned."[64] Elsewhere he says, "I was informed that Jesus (peace be upon him) said, 'Make your bodies endure hunger, thirst, nakedness, and exposure to the elements, so that your hearts might come to know [God].'"[65] What might Ibn Dinar have been "reading" to come up with such aphorisms? If he read Christian or Jewish texts, the language in which he read them would have been Aramaic: either Syriac or Hebrew Aramaic. However, it is important to note that for the most part Ibn Dinar's quotations are not actually from the Torah, the Psalms, or the Gospels. Instead, they appear to be apocryphal traditions that may have circulated among the indigenous non-Muslim population of southern Iraq. As such Ibn Dinar could just as likely have learned them in Arabic instead of in Syriac or Aramaic.

Further evidence that the metaphorical use of the heart in early Sufism may have been influenced by non-Muslim antecedents can be found in accounts transmitted by Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari (d. 845 CE), a student and disciple of the Sufi Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d. 830 CE).[66] In Chapter 3 it was noted that Darani originally lived in Basra but later moved to a village outside of Damascus in Syria.[67] Ibn Abi al-Hawari was also from Basra and moved to Syria with his teacher. After his arrival in Syria, he married the noted Sufi woman of Damascus, Rabi'a bint Isma'il (d. before 845 CE), who appears in Sufi hagiography as the most famous namesake of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. It was also mentioned in Chapter 3 that in exchange for giving up all of her wealth to Ibn Abi al-Hawari, Rabi'a bint Isma'il compelled her husband to practice a celibate form of marriage that was popular among the lay ascetics of early Syrian Christianity.

Although they have been overlooked by most contemporary scholars of early Sufism, Darani and Ibn Abi al-Hawari are significant because they were connected in various ways to the most important centers of early Sufism: Iraq, Syria, and Khurasan (present-day eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia). Evidence also suggests that when they resided in Basra, they were aware of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and her circle. For example, in his Book of Sufi Women Sulami cites Ibn Abi al-Hawari as the source of an account about Maryam of Basra, an alleged disciple of Rabi'a who was noted for her practice of Love mysticism.[68] Both Sulami and Ibn al-

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[63] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 2, 357

[64] Ibid, 376

[65] Ibid, 370

[66] For information on Ahmad Ibn Abi al-Hawari see Sulami, *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*, 98-102; Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 10, 5-33; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 836-7; and Massignon, *Essay*, 152-8.

[67] Abu Sulayman's *nisba*, "al-Darani," came from the name of this village. See Sulami, *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*, 75-82, Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 9, 254-80, and Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 828-34.

[68] See Chapter 1 and Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 84-5.

Jawzi cite accounts via Ibn Abi al-Hawari about Bahriyya, a piety-minded woman (*'abida*) and "knower of God" (*'arifa*) from Basra who was a disciple of Shaqiq al-Balkhi.[69]

In *Hilyat al-awliya'*, Isfahani mentions that Abu Sulayman al-Darani was a teacher of the famous Egyptian mystic Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri (d. 859 CE).[70] Darani was also a close associate and possible disciple of Salih ibn 'Abd al-Jalil, who was mentioned above as one of the first to call himself a "Sufi." In the *Hilya*, Darani is the source of a statement by Ibn 'Abd al-Jalil (similar but not identical to the one quoted in the previous section), concerning God's favor toward the group known as "God's Obedient Ones."[71] Might this suggest that the earliest Sufis, Massignon's "Shiite Sufiyya," "God's Obedient Ones," and Muhasibi's "Pure Ones" were the same group? At this point, there is not enough evidence to say. However, genealogical connections such as these demonstrate that much more research needs to be done into the links between Proto-Sufis and self-designated Sufis in the eighth and ninth centuries CE.

Many accounts attributed to Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari describe personal encounters with Christian monks or relate traditions that could only have come from Jewish interlocutors. In *Hilyat al-awliya'* he recounts the following teaching on renunciation from a monk at the Syrian monastery of Dayr Harmila: "We find in our books that the body of the Son of Adam is created from earth but his soul is created from the heavenly realm (*malakut al-sama'*). When the body is made hungry and naked and suffers deprivation, the soul is freed to go back up to the place from which it came. However, when the body has food, water, sleep, and rest it fixes itself permanently in the place in which it was born, for there is nothing more beloved to it than the World."[72] In another account, Ibn Abi al-Hawari relates a saying from the Prophet Joseph: "My God, verily I turn toward you with the righteousness of my father Abraham Your Friend, of Isaac Your Sacrifice, and of Jacob Your Israel." Then God revealed to him: "Oh Joseph, did you turn toward me with the grace that I bestowed on all of them?" Because Ibn Abi al-Hawari is unclear about the meaning of this tradition, he goes to his teacher to inquire about it. Darani explains the tradition in the following way: "Verily God approaches him first with the love of His friends, then He comes to him according to the spiritual station with which his heart is occupied."[73]

c. *The Metaphor of the Heart for Rabi'a and Her Contemporaries*

The use of the heart as a metaphor for the self in the above exegesis illustrates a motif that appears repeatedly in the notices on Darani in *Hilyat al-awliya'*. Among the Sufis of his generation, Darani is most often associated with statements about the heart in this work.

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[69] Ibid, 148-9 and Ibn al-Jawzi Appendix to Ibid, 296-7; Ibn al-Jawzi claims without attribution that Bahriyya led gatherings for invocation at her house in Basra (*wa kana laha majlisun tudhakkiru fihi*).

[70] If this report were true, Dhu al-Nun would have studied with Darani in Syria. See Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 9, 254-5.

[71] Ibid, 255

[72] Ibid, vol. 10, 5; the doctrine of the soul as expressed by this Christian monk is Platonic in origin. According to Pierre Hadot, early Christian teachers frequently borrowed ideas from the writings of pagan Neo-Platonists, such as in the following statement by St. Ambrose of Milan: "A blessed soul it is which penetrates the secrets of the Word. For awakening from the body, becoming a stranger to everything else, she seeks within herself and searches, so as to find out whether she can, in some way, reach divine being." Hadot, *Plotinus*, 25 n. 5

[73] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 10, 9

Although he was not the only early Sufi to use the heart as a metaphor, his prominence in the *Hilya* indicates that Isfahani regarded him as one of the most important specialists on the heart in the formative period of Sufism. [74] In general, Abu Sulayman al-Darani's statements about the heart can be seen as an early form of personality theory, in which the heart stands for the self and the states of the heart correspond to what we today would call personality traits. As such, his doctrine of the heart can be viewed as a forerunner of the more fully developed personality theory of al-Harith al-Muhasibi, a fellow native of Basra, whose "science of hearts" (*'ilm al-qulub*) was to have a ong-lasting influence on Sufism.

Based on Isfahani's account of his teachings, Darani's doctrine of the heart was founded on three central themes or motifs:

1. *The preoccupation of the heart*, expressed by the metaphors of "filling" the heart (*'imarat al-qalb*) and "emptying" the heart (*khawa' al-qalb*);
2. *The condition of the heart*, expressed by metaphorical references to the "place" or station of the heart (*manzilat al-qalb*) and the cohesiveness of the heart (*ijma' al-qalb*);
3. *The knowledge of the heart*, expressed by metaphorical references to the "awareness" of the heart (*ittila' al-qalb*), the "vision" of the heart (*basar al-qalb*), and the "light" of the heart (*nur al-qalb*).

The first of these themes, the preoccupation of the heart, is closely related to asceticism, and in particular to the concept of essential asceticism. Here, "filling" the heart does not mean that the heart is filled with God; on the contrary, it means being preoccupied with material concerns or passions. This metaphor reflects a Platonic ethic and is also reminiscent of early Christian teachings, in which renunciation or "emptying the heart" is equated with purification. Darani explains this metaphor in the following way: "Sinful suggestions (*al-wasawis*) only come to a heart that is full. Have you ever seen a thief going to empty ruins, scrutinizing them and entering them from any door he wishes? No. A thief only comes to houses with material goods locked inside of them, seeking to open them so that he might steal what is in them."[75] In another account he describes the preoccupation of the heart in terms of the World/Nonworld dichotomy: "When the World (*al-dunya*) comes to the heart, the Nonworld (*al-akhira*) moves away from it; and if the World is in the heart, the Nonworld will never come to it. This is because the World is worthless (*la'ima*) whereas the Nonworld is valuable (*'aziza*)."[76] In yet another account, Darani explains the metaphor of emptying the heart in terms of the heart's "hunger" and "thirst": "When the heart is made hungry or thirsty, it is purified and made valuable; but when it is satiated, it is rendered blind and worthless."[77] This reference to the purifying effects of hunger and thirst allude to the practice of systematic fasting as a form of bodily mortification, which, as we have seen in Chapter 2, was more representative of Christian than early Muslim asceticism. Although Darani's reference to the "hunger" and "thirst" of the heart may refer metaphorically to a regime

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[74] The section on Abu Sulayman al-Darani in the most recent edition of the *Hilya* comprises 26 pages and is one of the longer sections in the volume in which it appears. See Ibid, vol. 9, 254-80.

[75] Ibid, 257

[76] Ibid, 260

[77] Ibid, 266

of inward purification, it more likely indicates that he and his followers practiced fasting as part of their ascetic disciplines.[78]

This last statement by Darani links the theme of the preoccupation of the heart with the themes of the condition, station, and knowledge of the heart. For Darani, it was not enough to just empty the heart of the World; each stage of filling the heart with the divine presence called forth greater responsibilities and hence a greater danger of earning God's displeasure: "For each level that the station (*manzila*) of the heart is raised, the opportunity for divine punishment increases."[79] In order not to fail these responsibilities, one must maintain strict ascetic discipline and associate only with those whose company strengthens one's resolve on the path toward God. As the following statement by Darani explains, the "cohesive heart" or united self depends on a complete transformation of the personality. This is to be accomplished with the help of one's brethren among the Piety-Minded and the pursuit of illuminative knowledge through the practices of meditation and retreat: "Reject all pride in the mind's knowledge (*radd sabil al-'ajab bi-ma'rifat al-nafs*). Instead, dedicate yourself to the cohesion of the heart by committing few errors, seek the flawlessness of the heart (*riqqat al-qalb*) by sitting with the God-fearing, procure the illumination of the heart through constant sorrow, seek the way to sorrow with constant meditation (*tafakkur*), and seek the presence of meditation through the practice of retreat (*khalwa*)."[80]

Many of the modes of expression that were used by Darani to speak about the heart can also be found in statements attributed to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and other Proto-Sufis of the eighth century CE. For example, Kalabadhi cites the following statement by Rabi'a in *al-Ta'arruf*: "A group of people came to visit Rabi'a in order to console her for some complaint. They said to her, 'What is your condition?' She replied, 'By God! I know of no cause for my illness, except that Paradise was revealed to me, and my heart was drawn toward it. I think that my Lord was jealous of me, so He reproached me; for only He can make such a reproach.'"[81] In this tradition, Rabi'a's physical condition mimics the condition of her heart. Echoing Darani's concern with the heart's purity, she likens her heart's preoccupation with Paradise to baser and more material preoccupations with the World. Her "illness" comes from the realization that even Paradise is a created thing; therefore, the only proper approach for the ascetic is toward God Himself, without regard for anything else, even such a worthwhile thing as Heaven. God, as the jealous Beloved, reproaches Rabi'a, troubling her heart and leaving her soul in an agitated state. This state is comparable to *al-nafs al-lawwama*, the "self-blaming soul" that would later become an important part of Muhasibi's Sufi psychology.

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[78] The frequent references to hunger by Darani in the *Hilya* might also suggest that the statements about hunger attributed to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya by the Andalusian Sufi Abu Madyan may have originated with Darani or Ibn Abi al-Hawari. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the statements about hunger in Abu Madyan's *Bidayat al-murid* are unique in the corpus of Rabi'a traditions. Throughout the period of Umayyad rule in Spain (755-1031 CE), Andalusian Islam was strongly influenced by Syrian doctrines and practices. Although little is known about the early history of Sufism in this region, early Andalusian Sufism most likely also followed Syrian precedents. Since Darani and Ibn Abi al-Hawari were major Sufi figures from Syria, it is not unreasonable to expect that when reports about Darani, or perhaps Rabi'a bint Isma'il, reached Muslim Spain, they were conflated with reports about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.

[79] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 9, 257

[80] Ibid, 266

[81] Kalabadhi, *al-Ta'arruf*, 121; Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, 159

A similar depiction of the heart as a metaphor for the self can be found in an account from *Hilyat al-awliya'* about Rabi'a's contemporary Ibrahim ibn Adham. In this tradition the famous ascetic states: "View all of creation in your heart without discrimination: preoccupy yourself with your sins instead of judging others for their sins and make sure to utter beautiful words from a humble heart for the sake of God Most High. Reflect on your sins and repent them to your Lord. Doing so will establish ethical precaution (*wara'*) in your heart, so do not be greedy for anything other than your Lord."[82] For Ibn Adham as for Rabi'a and Darani, the heart is the seat of spiritual judgment, and its condition affects the ability of the ascetic and mystic to "see" spiritual realities. However, in this tradition the heart is also depicted as the site of moral judgment; thus, it requires the ethical precaution of *wara'* in order to become properly oriented toward God as the ultimate reality. For Ibn Adham, essential asceticism is the perfect realization of ethical precaution, because it empties the heart of all things but God.

In his Book of Sufi Women, Sulami mentions a group of people that he calls *arbab al-qulub*, "Masters of Hearts," or specialists in the doctrine of the heart.[83] Just as with his references to "weepers" and "those who cause others to weep" discussed in Chapter 2, this reference to early Sufi "heart specialists" indicates that when Sulami and other systematizers of Sufi doctrine looked back on the Proto-Sufis and ascetics of Rabi'a's generation, they noticed that certain individuals relied more heavily than others on the heart as a metaphor in their teachings. One of the early Sufi women that Sulami highlights as a "Master of Hearts" is Hukayma of Damascus, a contemporary of Rabi'a who was the teacher of Rabi'a's Syrian namesake, Rabi'a bint Isma'il. In a teaching that anticipates Darani's motif of the "empty" heart, Hukayma interprets the Qur'anic passage, "Except one who comes to God with a sound heart" (Qur'an, 26:89), in the following way: "It means that when one encounters God, there should be nothing in his heart other than Him."[84] Darani is said to have approved of this statement because he felt that the only truly "healthy" heart (*qalb salim*) was one that had been emptied of the World and was thus ready to receive knowledge from God. Hukayma's exegesis also expresses a similar sentiment to one of the most famous statements attributed to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya: "Love for the Creator (*al-Khaliq*) has preoccupied me from love for created beings (*al-makhluqin*)."[85] For both Rabi'a and Hukayma a heart that is spiritually sound is a heart that is empty of all but God and is oriented toward Him alone.

One of the most important sources of traditions about Rabi'a is *Tahdhib al-asrar* (The Primer of Secrets) by 'Abd al-Malik al-Kharkushi (d. 1016 CE). As we saw in the previous chapter, Kharkushi lived in Nishapur at the same time as both Sulami and al-Hasan al-Nisaburi, the author of *'Uqala' al-majanin*. Taken together, the works of Kharkushi, Sulami, and Nisaburi provide some of the most important information currently available on eighth-century Proto-Sufism and the circle of women around Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Like Sulami's Book of Sufi

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[82] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 8, 16; a later version of this account can be found in Qushayri's *Risala* (258), where Rabi'a states, "I looked with my heart at Heaven (*nazartu bi-qalbi ila-l-janna*) and [God] corrected me, for He is the only one to do so. Therefore, I will never do this again."

[83] See, for example, the notice on Sha'wana of al-Ubulla in Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 106-7.

[84] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 126-7

[85] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*, 60; see also Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 78-9. Later versions of this tradition changed its key phrase from *hubb al-makhluqin* ("love for created beings") to *hubb al-makhluq* ("love for creation or created things"). This opened the statement to more abstract and theological meanings.

Women, Kharkushi's *Primer of Secrets* portrays Rabi'a as a Sufi. In the following account from this work, which also appears as an epigraph to this chapter, she describes the heart and the knowledge it contains as God's possessions: "Verily, the Knower of God (*'arif*) asks God to grant him a heart. So [God] grants it to him from Himself. When he possesses the heart, he then offers it back to his Lord and Master, so that in [God's] repossession of it he will be protected and will be veiled in its concealment from created beings."[86]

Unfortunately, no chain of transmission is given for this account, so there is no way to verify whether it really came from Rabi'a. However, if it did, it is significant because doctrinally it goes beyond other expressions of the heart-as-metaphor, including those of Darani, who also spoke of the heart's knowledge. Its closest analogue among the sayings of other Proto-Sufis is a tradition from Nisaburi's *'Uqala' al-majanin* that is attributed to Hayyuna. As we saw in Chapter 3, Nisaburi depicts Hayyuna as Rabi'a's teacher. In this account, Hayyuna asks God to grant her stillness or peacefulness of heart and bestow divine acceptance upon her: "Oh God, grant me stillness of heart through the contract of my complete trust in you (*hab li sukun al-qalb bi-'aqd al-thiqa bi-ka*). Make all of my thoughts, ideas, and inclinations accord with your acceptance of me. Do not make my fate deprive me of you. Oh hope of those who seek hope!"[87]

What is most significant in these statements is that the heart is portrayed as God's property, and that the human being possesses her heart on loan from God as the result of a binding agreement or contract. Hayyuna refers to a contract of trust (*'aqd al-thiqa*), while Rabi'a speaks of giving the heart back to God as if it were the repayment of a loan. Both statements also refer to the concept of complete trust in God (*tawakkul* or *al-thiqa bi-llah*), which, as we saw in Chapter 2, was an important spiritual attitude for early Islamic ascetics. Since both Hayyuna and Rabi'a were practitioners of Love mysticism, one might imagine that Hayyuna's metaphor of a contract is based on the Islamic marriage contract (*'aqd al-zawaj*), and that Rabi'a's metaphor of a loan or a gift alludes to the female lover's gift of her heart to her male beloved. In either of these cases, the relationship between the mystic and God would be analogous to a spiritual marriage. The metaphor of marriage and the portrayal of the mystic as God's "bride" is also supported by references to veiling (*hijab*) and concealment (*sitr*) in Rabi'a's statement and by the supplication for God's pleasure and acceptance (*rida'*) in Hayyuna's prayer. In both traditions the heart is portrayed as a spiritual domicile: as in the Islamic marriage, the bride takes up residence in the husband's home, where she is concealed and protected from the gaze of outsiders. By virtue of the contract of trust between husband and wife, she becomes "Mistress of the House," although the actual owner of the house is her husband. Just as the bride knows that her status is dependent on her husband's good pleasure, the knower of God (*al-'arif bi-llah*) is also aware that the condition of the heart as a home for the spirit also depends on God's good pleasure. This is why Hayyuna asks God to insure that the preoccupations of her heart remain in accord with the desires of her heavenly bridegroom. Rabi'a's statement is more altruistic than Hayyuna's in its expression of trust but its meaning is essentially the same. Just as a successful marriage depends on mutual trust between husband and wife and the maintenance of a quiet and peaceful home, so the gift of God's knowledge depends on a devoted and trusting heart.

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[86] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*, 53

[87] Nisaburi, *'Uqala' al-majanin*, 150

IV. RABI'A THE KNOWER

As Amy Hollywood has observed, in hagiography, when God is represented as the male lover in contrast to the female soul, "the cultural association of women with eroticism is [at the same time] accepted, spiritualized, and, in part, subverted."[88] The marital imagery in Hayyuna's and Rabi'a's statements discussed above represents an Islamic version of this rhetorical form. However, the presence of marital imagery alone does not necessarily mean that real women's voices are present in these accounts. Often, the use of such imagery turns out to be another example of "men writing women." As Catherine M. Mooney has observed about the hagiographic depiction of Christian women saints in the Middle Ages, the presence of nuptial imagery in "male hagiographic texts describing women's relationship with God appears to reflect a particularly male concern that is not similarly echoed in many women's self-representations."[89] Following Mooney, we might similarly suggest that because men transmitted the traditions of early Sufi women, these texts reflect male cultural associations, even when they appear to speak with women's voices. According to Mooney, domestic imagery is more representative than nuptial imagery of the voices of real women.[90] This observation is echoed by Caroline Walker Bynum, who claims that in the writings and statements of medieval Christian women, "all women's central images turn out to be continuities."[91] That is to say, rather than dramatically using their unique status to reject the values of the dominant society as Leila Ahmed has claimed for Sufi women, medieval women mystics were actually more likely to frame their depictions of spiritual life in terms of ordinary life experiences.[92]

One can argue that the notion of domesticity can also be found in the statements by Hayyuna and Rabi'a quoted above. However, the primacy of nuptial imagery in them seems better to support the assertions of Mooney and Bynum. One of the most important contributions of Amy Hollywood's research to the feminist study of hagiography has been to demonstrate that the subversion of women's stereotypes in medieval works of spirituality is more often due to men than to women. While women's stories most often express the language of daily life, it is men who favor dramatic stories of life changes and role reversals. At times, men may find it useful to subvert gender stereotypes in order to make a doctrinal point, as was done by the Andalusian Sufi Ibn 'Arabi and the German mystic Meister Eckhart.[93] Such twists and turns of rhetorical form make it hard to draw conclusions about voice from the statements of female Christian saints or Sufi women alike. As Hollywood's analyses of hagiography and feminist theory demonstrate, to indulge in "universal claims made with regard to particular historical places, times, and evidence,

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[88] Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 7

[89] Catherine M. Mooney, "Voice, Gender, and the Portrayal of Sanctity," in Mooney, ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 12

[90] Ibid

[91] Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols," in idem, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 48

[92] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 96

[93] On Ibn 'Arabi see Sadiyya Sheikh, "In Search of *al-Insan*: Sufism, Islamic Law, and Gender," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 77 (4), 2009, 781-822. On Eckhart, see Hollywood, op. cit.

is dangerous both to scholarship and to feminist political and ethical aims, for it works to obscure crucial differences between women themselves, as well as between men."[94]

Such a warning is appropriate with respect to Rabi'a in particular, because the main subject of her teachings is not gender, but knowledge. Whatever else the "real" Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya may have been, she was certainly a woman of knowledge. Indeed, the trope of "Rabi'a the Knower of God" (*Rabi'a al-'arifa bi-llah*) is intimately related to the trope of Rabi'a the Lover. This trope provides a thread that links the earliest accounts about her in Burjulani, Muhasibi, Jahiz, and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur and key medieval depictions of her in Makki, Sulami, Ghazali, and 'Attar, to modern scholarly versions of her life and teachings, such as those of Margaret Smith, 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, and Su'ad 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq. The figure of Rabi'a the Knower also lies behind the figures of Rabi'a the Teacher and Rabi'a the Ascetic. Not only has love been portrayed as a way of knowing since biblical times but also Rabi'a's reputation as the founder of Love mysticism in Islam is based on the premise that she, like Plato's Diotima, she was "a wise woman in [Love] and many other branches of knowledge" (see Chapter 3).

Although the Rabi'a who appears in medieval Islamic literature occasionally cries out, weeps, or falls into a faint when male hagiographers try to describe her with gender-based stereotypes, it is mostly in modern romantic versions of Rabi'a that the image of the wise and knowledgeable woman is replaced by the dreamy lover of New Age spirituality. Even 'Attar, who as we will see in the next chapter, made up the story of Rabi'a's life that is used by nearly all of today's romantic writers, felt compelled to assert, "When a woman is on the path of God Most High [as Rabi'a was], she is a man and cannot be called a woman."[95]

Two centuries before 'Attar, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami had something similar in mind when he portrayed Rabi'a as the quintessential Sufi woman. Although he did not go so far as to call her an honorary man, he made a point of stressing how some of the most honored men of early Islam sought out her knowledge.[96] Anyone who doubts that Sulami considered Rabi'a as wise as a man should recall his description of her encountering a criminal who had been crucified for immoral acts. Rather than cringing, weeping, or fainting at the sight before her, she looks directly at the suffering person and says, "Upon my father! With that tongue you used to say, 'There is no god but God!" Then she mentioned the good works that the man had done.[97] In this anecdote, Rabi'a combines a rebuke of the condemned man's sins with the merciful recollection of his good works, thus expressing an Islamic notion of justice in which a punishment that is deserved is not averted but God's mercy still leaves the door open for forgiveness.

Rabi'a's observation about the condemned man also expresses what Amy Hollywood has called the "ethics of detachment" in hagiographic literature. In this trope, the saint steps aside in matters of moral judgment and allows God's justice to proceed in its own way.[98] According to

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[94] Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 197

[95] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 61 and Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 155; the latest major work on Rabi'a— Jean Annestay, *Une Femme Soufie en Islam: Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (Paris: Éditions Entrelacs, 2009)— provides a good example of how romantic narratives continue to depend on 'Attar. Although Annestay acknowledges in several places that 'Attar's accounts are historically anachronistic, he nonetheless relies on them as if they were true.

[96] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 74-5

[97] Ibid, 80-81

[98] Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 193-6

Hollywood, feminist theory regards the ethics of detachment as the expression of a "male bias toward rationality, disembodiment, and justice."[99] However, she argues, there is no necessary correlation between male gender and either rationality or justice, nor is there a necessary connection "between disinterestedness and rationality, or between the ideal of justice and a rule-based ethical system. By the same token, there is no necessary disjunction between embodiment and rationality or justice."[100]

Although it would be an exaggeration to regard all Sufi women as "culture-critiquing female heroes" (a term coined by Marcia Hermansen and with which Leila Ahmed agrees), it is true that certain female saints are meant to transcend gender stereotypes, even if the men who write about them cannot do this themselves.[101] Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is a figure of this type. The ethics of detachment that she displays in Sulami's depiction of her reflects the virtues of *muruwwa* ("manliness" or maturity) and *hilm* (patience, forbearance, and good judgment) that are key elements of the Islamic trope of the wisdom teacher (see Chapter 1). The cultural importance of these characteristics is that they signify the presence of intellect and sound reason (both denoted by the term *'aql*), properties that patriarchal Islamic society associated more with men than with women. Indeed, the presence of these traits in Rabi'a is what led Farid al-Din al-'Attar to state that she should be regarded as a man rather than as a woman. For 'Attar Rabi'a was a unique woman of knowledge who displayed the maturity, forbearance, and judgment of a man. This is why he made a point of placing her outside the category of women. In addition, although Rabi'a's virtues are consistent with the ethics of detachment described by Amy Hollywood, one should not assume that just because detachment is associated with a woman it connotes a passive personality. Quite the opposite is the case: to recall Toshihiko Isutzu's statement cited in Chapter 1, one should instead think of such characteristics as the qualities "of a [person] who governs and dominates others, and not of those who are governed and dominated."[102] In other words, as the possessor of the qualities of reason, wisdom, and detachment, Rabi'a the Knower was a figure of power.

For many Sufi writers, Rabi'a is a figure of power because the knowledge she possesses gives her the ability to make remarkable insights. However, for the figure of Rabi'a the Sufi— as opposed to that of Rabi'a the Teacher— the knowledge that conveys this ability is not only expressed by sound reason and judgment. Sufism is indeed a way of knowledge, but because it is also a form of mysticism it seeks knowledge that goes beyond the knowledge of *'aql* or formal reasoning. For the Sufi, it is not enough to know *about* something; instead, what is most important is to *know the ways of knowing* as thoroughly as possible, to tap into the essence of knowledge itself. Rabi'a could impart memorable insights to those who learned from her because she possessed this deeper type of knowledge. For the Sufi hagiographers who wrote about her, it did not matter whether or not she called herself a Sufi. Because her statements demonstrate that she possesses the type of knowledge that is the hallmark of Sufism, she could only have been a

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[99] 197

[100] Ibid, 198

[101] See Marcia Hermansen, "The Female Hero in the Islamic Religious Tradition," in *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 2:130. As noted above, Amy Hollywood has pointed out that most often it is male writers, rather than the women they represent, who are the real culture critics.

[102] Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 207

Sufi. Thus, the distinction made in the present chapter between the figures of Rabi'a the Sufi and the other tropes in which she appeared was for premodern Sufi writers a theoretical distinction at best— if they ever thought of such a distinction at all. For them the figures of Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, and Rabi'a the Lover were indistinguishable from the figure of Rabi'a the Sufi.

In addition to focusing on the "roots" or essence of knowledge, the Sufi approach to knowledge seeks a greater understanding of the "fruits" of knowledge. To put it another way, knowing *how* one knows leads to a new way of thinking about *what* one knows. The person who knows the material world knows about things— this informational form of knowledge operates on the outside (*al-zahir*), on the surface of reality, so to speak. Outside knowledge is what the Qur'an refers to when it says that God taught Adam the "names" of all things (Qur'an, 2:31). To know the "name" of a thing is to know its identity and to know it as a fact: it means to know what a thing is and how to make use of it. This kind of practical, theoretical, or scientific knowledge is fundamental to living in the world and the one who possesses it is better off than the one who does not.[103] In Arabic a person who has attained expertise in such knowledge is called *'alim* ("one who knows," pl. *'ulama*, "scholars") or *khabir* ("knowledgeable one" or "expert"). The value of this type of knowledge is underscored by the fact that the divine names *al-Khabir* and *al-'Alim* (a variant of *'alim* which means "continuously knowing") appear in the Qur'an.[104] However, for the Sufi this external type of knowledge does not go far enough. Even in the world of ordinary human experience, the person who knows a thing most thoroughly knows more than just its form or purpose. For example, to really know a favorite chair is to have had the experience of sitting in it, feeling its shape, and knowing how it suits the body; to truly know a loved one is to know the person intimately, in ways that are not accessible to another. In a similar vein, the Sufi desires to know the reality of things, to obtain "inside" knowledge (*'ilm al-batin*), to know things at their source and root. This is the type of knowledge that separates Sufism from other forms of knowledge in Islam. In Sufism, the ultimate goal of the search for knowledge is God, because God is the source of all things. However, as the source of all things God is also the source of all knowledge. This realization leads to the central paradox of Sufi mysticism: How is one to know God, the Reality that everyone seeks to know, when He is both the Knower and the Known?

Although he was not a Sufi, Jahiz had a sense of this type of knowledge when he called Rabi'a the Teacher a "woman of *bayan*." For Jahiz, a true intellectual was one who understood ideas or concepts at their roots. As a Sufi theorist, Abu Talib al-Makki was similarly aware that Rabi'a possessed a special kind of knowledge when he called her *muhiqqa*: by using this term he

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[103] For a modern discussion of how the "names" of things impart theoretical or scientific knowledge, see Bediüzaman Said Nursi (d. 1960), *The Words: The Reconstruction of Islamic Belief and Thought*, trans. Huseyn Akarsu (Somerset, New Jersey, The Light Inc., 2005). For Nursi, Adam, the father of humanity, was taught the "names of all things" (i.e., the 99 Divine Names of Islam) as an inspiration for the natural sciences: "Each natural science, which discusses the reality of entities, can be a true science full of wisdom only by discerning the regulating, directing, administering, sustaining, and all-embracing manifestations of the Divine Name the All-Wise [*al-Hakim*] in things; in the benefits and advantages of those things; and by being based on that Name" (274-5).

[104] See the above-quoted discussion by Nursi and Qur'an 66:3: "She asked, 'Who informed you of this?' And [the Prophet] said, 'The Eternally Knowing and the All-Informed told me of this'" (*qala naba'ani al-'Aleem al-Khabir*).

meant that she was a Sufi woman who could teach others how everything "works" or "fits together" in both the inner and outer worlds of reality.[105] Each of these writers in his own way saw Rabi'a's wisdom as unique. Through the wisdom of her teachings she could strip away the veil of appearances and reveal something about the true nature of things. Metaphorically, one could say that she embodied James Geary's description of the aphoristic teaching: "Inside an aphorism it is minds that collide and the new matter that spins out at the speed of thought is that elusive thing we call wisdom."[106] As Sufis and Zen teachers can both affirm, creating a good aphorism is more difficult than creating a good argument. This is because teaching by aphorisms requires a deeper and more profound type of understanding than is required for most arguments. To put it another way: the ability to convey a paradox requires a paradoxical type of knowledge.

However, Rabi'a's ability to teach with aphorisms was not her only intellectual gift. As a *muhiqqa*, she also provided a deeper understanding of moral conduct and even of the Shari'a. By intimately knowing the proper relationship between what pertains to God (*huquq Allah*) and what pertains to the human being (*huquq al-insan*), she possessed the ability to act appropriately at all times and in all contexts. As explained in Chapter 1, in the value system of early Islam, this sense of appropriateness was an important sign of *hilm*. Rabi'a's ability to accord everything its proper right or due (a notion expressed by the term *haqq*) compelled her to cast a critical eye over her acts and those of others. Statements such as, 'By God, I am ashamed to ask for the world from the One who owns the world, so how can I ask for the world from one who does not own it?" express this sense of propriety. The same can be said for the "tough love" that she gave to Sufyan al-Thawri: "How can you ask for [safety from the World] while you are still soiled with the World?"[107] It is in this sense of Rabi'a as a *muhiqqa* and not in terms of modern feminist theory that one can most accurately call her a "culture-critic."

Through her critical observations of human behavior, Rabi'a prompted her students and interlocutors to weigh their thoughts and actions on an internal scale of values that was more sensitive than the outward scale of the Shari'a. This ethic constituted a sort of *fiqh al-batin*, an inward scale of motives and values, in which behaviors were judged morally rather than legally. Rabi'a's approach to *fiqh* went back to the original root of this term, which means, "to understand." We can see in several of her reported statements that her *fiqh* involved the interrogation of moral and ethical states. Perhaps the best illustration of this aspect of her knowledge can be seen in an account from Makki's *Qut al-qulub* that was discussed in Chapter 2. In this tradition, Sufyan al-Thawri asks Rabi'a, "Inform us by what means God has endowed you with such subtleties of wisdom. Every act of worship has a rule behind it and every act of faith has an inner meaning, so what is the meaning of your faith?" Rabi'a replies: "I do not worship God out of fear of God. If I did, I would be like the disobedient slave-girl who only works when she is afraid. Nor [do I worship God] out of a love for heaven. If I did, I would be like the disobedient slave-girl who only works when she is given something. Instead, I worship God out of love for Him alone and out of yearning for Him."[108] In this story, the jurist Sufyan al-Thawri rather than Rabi'a states the premises of *fiqh al-batin* by saying, "Every act of worship has a rule behind it and every act of faith has an inner meaning." Rabi'a's answer illustrates how *fiqh al-*

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[105] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 95

[106] Geary, *The World in a Phrase*, 16

[107] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 76-7

[108] Makki, *Qut al-qulub*, vol. 2, 94

batin is supposed to work. In the generation after her death, the notion of *fiqh al-batin* would become important for Sufi ethics through the writings of al-Harith al-Muhasibi. Indeed, the very term *muhasaba* from which the name *al-Muhasibi* is taken refers to the method of self-examination on which *fiqh al-batin* is based.

In Sufism as it has developed since Rabi'a's time, knowledge about the outer nature of things is designated by the term *'ilm*, whereas knowledge about the inner nature of things is referred to as *ma'rifa*.[109] The term *ma'rifa* does not appear in the Qur'an, nor does it figure prominently in Hadith. However, in the Qur'an the word *'ilm* is used approximately 750 times and encompasses all forms of knowledge, with special emphasis given to the concept of understanding, particularly of the revelations and signs of God. Although the word *ma'rifa* is not used in the Qur'an, terms derived from the Arabic root *'arafa* ("to know" or "to be familiar with") are used more than 70 times in the Qur'an and revolve semantically around the concept of knowledge as recognition.[110] Sometimes, the past participle *ma'ruf* ("known") is used in the Qur'an to designate actions that are lawful or morally transparent, as in the phrase, "commanding the good (*al-ma'ruf*) and forbidding evil" (Qur'an 9:71). Other forms of the verb *'arafa* are used in the Qur'an as well, but neither the verbal noun *ma'rifa* ("knowledge") nor the active participle *'arif* ("knower") appears, despite the fact that they were to become key terms in the technical vocabulary of Sufism.

The word *ma'rifa* as a term for inner knowledge began to be used by Sufis and Proto-Sufis in the eighth century CE, although it was also used in this period to designate knowledge in general. Evidence for the development of *ma'rifa* as a technical term can be found in the sayings of a number of early Sufis, as in the statement by Abu Hashim al-Sufi discussed above: "Those who truly know God (*ahl al-ma'rifa bi-llah*) are alienated from [the World] and are desirous of the Hereafter." Here, as previously noted, a specific group of the Piety-Minded is singled out as the "People of the *Ma'rifa* of God." In this phrase *ma'rifa* denotes both knowledge and familiarity: those who truly know God are by implication also the "friends" or "protégés" of God (*awliya' Allah*, Qur'an 10:63). One may also note that during this same period *ma'rifa* became associated with the goal of essential asceticism, thus providing a doctrinal bridge between early Sufism and more widespread forms of asceticism in Islam.[111]

A technical discussion of *ma'rifa* that comes close to how this concept was understood in Rabi'a's time can be found in 'Ali al-Hujwiri's *Kashf al-mahjub*.[112] This work has already been

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[109] John Renard distinguishes these terms by defining *'ilm* as "discursive knowledge," "acquired knowledge," or "traditional knowledge." He defines *ma'rifa* as "experiential knowledge," "infused knowledge," "intimate knowledge," or "mystical knowledge." See idem, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology* (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey, Paulist Press, 2004), 7.

[110] Ibid, 13-14

[111] Renard places the first Sufi use of the concept of *ma'rifa* in the ninth century CE, and identifies Muhasibi as making the first "systematic effort to establish the foundations of Sufi thought as a legitimate religious discipline" (Ibid, 22). However, accounts of early Sufis and Proto-Sufis in works such as Isfahani's *Hilyat al-awliya'* make it clear that an understanding of *ma'rifa* that was very similar to the Sufi concept had developed by the second half of the eighth century CE.

[112] See Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 266-77. In the discussion that follows, I depart from R. A. Nicholson's English translations of some of Hujwiri's key concepts. For example, Nicholson translates *'ilm* as "cognition" and *hal* as "feeling." I find these translations to be superficial, and thus inappropriate to the meaning that Hujwiri tries to convey.

cited above for its famous statement on the paradox of the heart. Hujwiri's discussion of Sufi knowledge (which he terms *ma'rifat Allah*) is useful for the present discussion because it retains as sense of the importance of outward knowledge that characterized the Proto-Sufism of Rabi'a's generation. For Hujwiri *al-'ilm bi-llah*, outward knowledge of God, is essential for understanding Islamic law and dogma, and hence is the foundation for all religious knowledge. By contrast, *ma'rifa*, the inward knowledge of the Sufis, is a more advanced form of knowledge that comprises both the in-depth knowledge of things and attributes (*ma'rifa 'ilmiyya*), and the knowledge of states, contexts, and conditions (*ma'rifa haliyya*). Hujwiri states that *ma'rifa* is superior to *'ilm* because it is the most comprehensive form of knowledge and leads to the deepest understanding of God. Although possessing *'ilm*-knowledge of God is necessary because it is "the foundation of all blessings in this world and the next," it is spiritually of lesser worth because "the worth of everyone is in proportion to *ma'rifat Allah*, and he who is without *ma'rifa* is worth nothing."[113]

Hujwiri also draws a further distinction between *'ilm* and *ma'rifa*: The main problem with *'ilm* as a way of knowing God is that this form of knowledge requires one to "turn away" or distance herself from the object of knowledge in order to gain understanding. If one applied this logic to the knowledge of God, it would mean that she would have to distance herself from God in order to know Him. Thus, all that can be known of God through *'ilm* are outward manifestations of divinity, such as God's laws, dogmas, or divine attributes. For the Sufi this does not go far enough. However, in the knowledge that comes from *ma'rifat Allah*, one's approach to God is not limited in this way. As with *'ilm*, the knowledge of *ma'rifa* also requires a "turning away," but in this case knowledge is gained not by turning away from God, but by "turning away from everything that is *not* God." Thus, one who possesses true knowledge of God is able to attain an even better "objective distance" by seeing the World, so to speak, from God's perspective.[114]

Hujwiri's discussion of *ma'rifa* is helpful for understanding some of the statements attributed to Rabi'a that explain her essential asceticism. For example, when she is asked how she has attained her high spiritual station, she replies, "By leaving aside all that does not concern me and by cleaving to the One who always is."[115] According to Hujwiri's concept of knowledge, this would mean that essential asceticism involves the repositioning of the self with respect to the World in order to achieve a more profound perspective. Hujwiri's concept also provides an explanation for another of Rabi'a's aphorisms that has been discussed in this chapter: "For everything there is a fruit (*thamara*) and the fruit of *ma'rifa* is orientation toward God (*iqbal*)."[116] The most important point in this statement is that for Rabi'a *ma'rifat Allah* is both a goal and a return. Although orientation toward God is the "fruit" or outcome of *ma'rifa*, it is also the beginning of *ma'rifa* because one cannot know God until one has turned toward God. The concept of orientation is expressed in this aphorism by the verbal noun *iqbal*, which means "turning toward" or "orienting oneself toward" something. As we have seen, this term is also related conceptually to the word *tawba* or "repentance," which similarly comes from a root that means, "to turn." "Turning to God in repentance" is the first step on the path of asceticism

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[113] Ibid, 267

[114] For the entirety of this discussion, see Ibid, 269-271

[115] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-Asrar*, 81

[116] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 76-7 and Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-Asrar*, 49

because *turning away* from the World only makes sense if one *turns toward* God in place of the World. The paradox of Rabi'a's statement is that the more one knows God, the more one turns toward Him. Although turning toward God is supposed to come before knowledge of God, a greater knowledge of God reinforces and makes permanent the essential ascetic's "turn" toward the divine. Thus, in the most advanced spiritual state when the Sufi becomes a lover of God, both God and the human being are permanently "turned" toward each other.

This last comment also recalls the title of one of al-Harith al-Muhasibi's most important doctrinal works: *al-Qasd wa al-ruju' ila Allah* (God as the Goal and the Return). This book contains the earliest extant reference to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and significantly, it is the only citation of Rabi'a to be found in all of Muhasibi's works. In this citation Rabi'a refers to the practice of night-vigils and describes the "knower" of God as a lover of God: "The night has come, the darkness has mingled, and every lover is left alone with his beloved. Now I am alone with you, my Beloved."[117] This statement describes the same condition of mutual orientation as in the aphorism about *ma'rifa* and *iqbal* discussed above: in the state of knowledge-as-*ma'rifa*, the lover and the Beloved turn toward each other in a state of mutual regard.

Another statement about orientation, and which also includes a metaphorical reference to fruit (*thamara*), can be found in a well-known tradition that describes one of Rabi'a's dream visions. This moral of this story, which first appears in Makki's *Qut al-qulub*, is about what is lost when the worshipper forgets God and falls into heedlessness. The story is worth repeating in full because Rabi'a's statement that "the fruit of *ma'rifa* is orientation toward God" acts as a sort of exegesis for this dream narrative:

> Someone reported that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (may God Most High have mercy on her) said: "Once I offered prayers and invocations to God (*tasbihat*) all night until just before dawn. Then I fell asleep and saw a beautiful bright green tree, indescribable in its beauty and greatness, and adorned with three kinds of fruit unlike any I have known to be of this world. They resembled the breasts of virgins: one of them was white, the other was red, and another was yellow. They shone like moons and suns in the midst of the tree's bright greenness." Then she said: "I admired their beauty and asked, 'To whom does the tree belong?' A voice answered, 'It belongs to you because of your earlier glorification and praise of God.'" Rabi'a said: "I continued to circumambulate the tree, and then I noticed on the ground a fruit which was the color of gold. So I remarked, 'It would be better if this fruit was on the tree with the rest of the other fruit." Then the voice said to me, 'It was there, except when you were glorifying God, you thought about whether or not the dough had risen. As a result of this, the fruit fell off the tree.'" This is a lesson for those who are endowed with insight and a warning for those who fear and remember God.[118]

Let us put aside for a moment the reference in this tradition to fruit that look like virgins' breasts, for according to feminist scholars of hagiography this metaphor seems more suitable for a man's voice than for a woman's. What is most significant about this story in Sufi terms is that it highlights knowledge of God as a form of recollection or remembrance (*dhikr*), which corresponds to the Qur'anic understanding of the root verb *'arafa*. Besides drawing its inspiration from the Qur'an, the Sufi concept of knowledge-as-remembrance was also inspired by the traditions of Platonism and Neo-Platonism, in which knowledge is portrayed as the

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[117] Muhasibi, *al-Qasd wa-l-ruju' ila Allah*, 104

[118] Makki, *Qut al-Qulub,* vol. 1, 189

remembrance or recollection of the ideal forms of things. Unlike the term *ma'rifa*, however, which does not appear in the Qur'an, the term *dhikr* can be found in the Qur'an and Sufi notions of *dhikr* follow the Qur'anic models quite closely. Various forms of the verb *dhakara* ("to mention," "to recall," "to invoke the memory of") occur 290 times in the Qur'an. Even more, several verses in which the word *dhikr* is used in the Qur'an employ the term in ways that resemble later Sufi usage. Two examples of such verses are the following: "We did not send down before you aught but a man; so ask the People of Remembrance (*ahl al-dhikr*) if you do not know" (Qur'an, 16:43); "It is only through the remembrance of God that the heart is made peaceful (*ala bi-dhikri Allah tatma'innu al-qulub*, Qur'an 13:28). The first verse refers to a group known as the People of Remembrance: Sufis have long taken this designation for themselves. Sufis understand the second verse as constituting divine authorization for sessions of *dhikr* as invocation, a practice that has become a key characteristic of Sufism.

Doctrinal and hagiographical works that convey traditions about early Sufis indicate that the practice of *dhikr*, much like the concept of *ma'rifa*, began to gain importance in the second half of the eighth century CE, during Rabi'a's lifetime. Although most early references to *dhikr* as a spiritual practice in Sufi sources come from a generation or two after Rabi'a, certain key figures, including Rabi'a herself, are credited with establishing this practice. For example, in the chapter on *dhikr* in *Tahdhib al-asrar*, Kharkushi quotes Rabi'a as making the following supplication: "My God, I ask you to make my aspiration in the World my remembrance (*dhikr*) of you in the World; and [to make my aspiration of you] in the Hereafter the vision of you."[119] Kharkushi also quotes Abu Sulayman al-Darani as saying, "One who knows his Lord (*man 'arafa rabbahu*) finds that his heart is panicked because of the recollection (*dhikr*) of Him; it is preoccupied in service to Him, and it weeps at his mistakes."[120] In addition, Ibrahim ibn Adham is quoted as saying: "One who does not find three habits (*mawatin*) in his heart finds the door to God locked before him. [These are]: the recitation of the Qur'an; the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God the Great and Glorious; and prayer."[121]

These traditions are important both for what they say and for what they do not say. First, Darani's use of the verb *'arafa* indicates that the concept of *ma'rifa* in the sense of "knowing God well" was already well established in the generation following Rabi'a's death. The same can be said for the correspondence between the knowledge of God and the remembrance of God. The fact that Kharkushi cites Darani as speaking of *dhikr* is significant, because the early Sufi who is most often quoted by Kharkushi on the practice of *dhikr* is Dhu al-Nun al-Misri, who may have been a disciple of Darani. However, it is also important to note that these early mystics do not yet seem to have settled on a common understanding of *dhikr* or on how exactly the concept of *dhikr* relates to the concept of *ma'rifa*. Rabi'a's understanding of *dhikr* has to do primarily with the recollection of God's actions in the world. In Rabi'a's statement *dhikr* connotes remembrance through observation and reflection; thus, it is related to the concept of *tafakkur* ("consideration," "reflection," or "meditation"), which also begins to appear in the discourse of early Sufis around this time. Darani, on the other hand, seems to think of *dhikr* as an act of momentary recollection— as if God suddenly comes to mind and startles the worshipper into awareness of His presence. For Ibrahim ibn Adham, *dhikr* appears to be a form of invocation, because he

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[119] Kharkushi, *Tahdhib al-asrar*, 318
[120] Ibid
[121] Ibid

speaks of it as a practice to which the heart becomes accustomed. However, despite these differences, all of these statements relate the concept of *dhikr* to the symbolic image of the heart as the seat of the spiritual intellect. This provides further evidence that the concepts of heart, knowledge, and remembrance had already become defining elements of Proto-Sufism as it emerged at the end of the eighth century CE.

V. CONCLUSION: RABI'A THE SUFI AND THE LIMITS OF THE REAL

The similarity between the reported teachings of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and the early Sufi doctrines of al-Harith al-Muhasibi has been noted more than once in this study. In fact, virtually every one of Muhasibi's currently published works addresses at least one of the tropes of the Rabi'a narrative discussed so far. For example, Muhasibi's book *al-Masa'il fi-l-zuhd* (Teachings on Renunciation) covers many of the themes discussed in Chapter 2, "Rabi'a the Ascetic."[122] Much the same can be said of *Kitab al-makasib* (The Book of Outcomes), which, as we have seen, was a treatise on the practice of ethical precaution (*wara'*).[123] In two other works, *al-Rizq al-halal wa haqiqat al-tawakkul 'ala Allah* (Allowable Provision and the Reality of Reliance on God) and *al-Masa'il fi a'mal al-qulub wa-l-jawarih* (Teachings on the Actions of the Heart and the Limbs), Muhasibi discusses the practice of ethical precaution in relation to what I have called "essential asceticism."[124] Muhasibi also discusses the relations between essential asceticism, ethical precaution, and Sufism in *al-Qasd wa al-ruju' ila Allah* (God as the Goal and the Return). He also discusses these issues in his most famous book, *al-Ri'aya li-huquq Allah* (Attentiveness to the Rights of God). This last work conforms so closely to Rabi'a's reported views on knowledge and asceticism that it can be seen as reflecting what Makki probably had in mind when he called Rabi'a a *muhiqqa* in the chapter on Love in *Qut al-qulub*.

Abu Talib al-Makki's use of the term *muhiqqa* to describe Rabi'a may have been based on Muhasibi's teachings because by his time the latter's ethical theories had become widely known through the influence of the famous Sufi of Baghdad, Sari al-Saqati (d. 866 CE).[125] However, the influence of Muhasibi's concepts on the development of Sufism brings up another possibility with regard to the similarity of Muhasibi's and Rabi'a's doctrines. Might the figure of Rabi'a the Sufi as she appears in *Qut al-qulub* and other Sufi works after Makki have been colored by Muhasibi's views on Sufism? In other words, might the image of Rabi'a as an early proponent of Sufi doctrines have more to do with Muhasibi than with the real Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya? Do we have here an early Muslim example of male writers using the figure of a famous woman to "think through various troubling intellectual and theological problems that confronted male theologians," in the way that Elizabeth A. Clark described for Gregory of Nyssa and Macrina? Did the early systematizers of Sufism assume that Rabi'a the Sufi was a teacher of essential asceticism and the doctrine of the heart because Muhasibi had already made these doctrines noteworthy?

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[122] This work can be found in 'Ata, ed., *al-Masa'il fi a'mal al-qulub*, 41-87.

[123] Ibid, 171-245

[124] See Ibid and Muhasibi, *al-Rizq al-halal*.

[125] Sari al-Saqati was Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd's maternal uncle. On the relationship between Saqati and Muhasibi see Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, 39-41.

Although this possibility is intriguing, I am inclined to think that it was not in fact the case. I do not believe that the figure of Rabi'a the Sufi was nothing more than a trope constructed by later writers out of Muhasibi's depictions of early Sufism. One can cite several arguments in support of this conclusion. In the first place, we can be certain that the trope of Rabi'a the Lover did not originate with Muhasibi. Although Muhasibi was the earliest Sufi to quote Rabi'a on Love and he refers to the subjects of Love and intimacy with God in his works, he was not himself a practitioner of Love mysticism. Even though he agreed with Rabi'a that attaining intimacy with God was an important goal of the Sufi path, he did not express this goal in the way that Love mystics did. Muhasibi cites Rabi'a's statement on Love in *al-Qasd wa al-ruju' ila Allah* not because it agrees with his own approach but because it provides an alternate perspective on the concept of mystical knowledge.

We can also be certain that the tropes of Rabi'a the Teacher and Rabi'a the Ascetic were not based on Muhasibi's doctrines either. This is because some of the earliest traditions that support these tropes appear in the works of non-Sufis, who could not have been influenced by Muhasibi. For example, although Muhasibi and Jahiz were contemporaries and both came from Basra and moved to Baghdad, Jahiz's disapproval of Sufism made it highly unlikely that his depictions of Rabi'a were influenced by Muhasibi's ideas. The same can be said for Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, another non-Sufi who wrote about Rabi'a in the generation after Jahiz. Finally, we can be fairly sure that the similarity between Rabi'a's and Muhasibi's teachings are not tropological because the tradition of early Sufism contains many examples of similar doctrines expounded by Sufi men, some of which have been cited in this study. Why would male Sufi systematizers have to express these theological issues through a Sufi woman when there were plenty of early male ascetics, including proponents of the doctrine of Love, who could serve the same purpose?

The question of correspondence between the doctrines of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and al-Harith al-Muhasibi provides yet another example of the issue of narrative representation and truth that was discussed at the beginning of this chapter. How is one to know who influenced whom? If the figure of Rabi'a the Sufi was not dependent on Muhasibi's model of Sufism, then might Rabi'a have influenced Muhasibi? At the present time, it is impossible to answer this question definitively. The mere fact that Muhasibi cites a statement by Rabi'a is not enough by itself to prove that she influenced his doctrines in any significant way. All we can say is that Muhasibi shared some of the doctrines that were attributed to Rabi'a, especially the concept of essential asceticism. However, it is important to point out that I am not the first person to have noticed this correspondence. Even medieval writers noticed this. For example, in the chapter devoted to Muhasibi in *Hilyat al-awliya'* Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani cites Rabi'a as a proponent of Muhasibi's approach to asceticism. In fact, he uses the very statement that I used in Chapter 2 as the key illustration of the concept of essential asceticism: "Leaving aside what does not concern me and cleaving to the One who always is."[126] Clearly, Isfahani saw Rabi'a as agreeing with Muhasibi's approach to asceticism. This and other citations of Rabi'a in *Hilyat al-awliya'* are significant because there is no chapter devoted to her or to any other Sufi woman in his work. Although Rabi'a is not the only figure of early Sufism to appear in Isfahani's chapter on Muhasibi in the *Hilya*, her presence indicates that its author saw their doctrines as significantly similar. The

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[126] Isfahani, *Hilya*, vol. 10, 108

modern scholar Margaret Smith also appears to have noticed a correspondence between the doctrines of Rabi'a and Muhasibi. In her work on Muhasibi, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, she cites the same statement as Isfahani does and speculates that Muhasibi "may well have known [Rabi'a] in his youth, and whose fame must certainly have come to his ears."[127] Although Smith does not attempt to establish a direct doctrinal connection between Rabi'a and Muhasibi, one cannot help but wonder if it was only a coincidence that her two most significant books are on these figures.

In dealing with an iconic figure such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, whose statements are often encountered but for whom information is both scarce and problematical, it is hard to determine in any individual case whether one is faced with historical evidence or with what Hayden White called "the fictions of factual representation." Keeping this fact in mind is especially important when assessing the trope of Rabi'a the Sufi because Sufi tradition assumes both that Rabi'a really existed and that she was a Sufi. In summarizing the figure of Rabi'a the Sufi in early Islamic literature, four themes stand out as being of key importance: (1) essential asceticism; (2) the doctrine of Love; (3) the doctrine of the heart; and (4) the doctrine of knowledge-as-*ma'rifa*. As we have seen, each of these doctrines except for Love was central to Muhasibi's teachings as well. Although Love was not a key concept for Muhasibi, he did discuss it in his works in the context of intimacy with God. A century and a half later, Abu Talib al-Makki would develop the concept of Love further and make it central to his own approach to Sufism and to his portrayal of Rabi'a the Lover. Thus, a further question arises: if the figure of Rabi'a the Sufi was not just a trope constructed out of Muhasibi's Sufi doctrines, is it possible to speculate that a doctrinal genealogy might be drawn from Rabi'a through Muhasibi to Makki, and from Makki to Ghazali and other Sufis? A genealogical connection between Muhasibi and Makki through Ghazali has long been established. What would make this genealogy different is that Rabi'a now comes in from the margins to become central to the development of several important Sufi doctrines. In this model, she is more than just a famous Sufi woman or an exponent of Love mysticism. She now emerges as an important contributor to the doctrine of the heart and the Sufi approach to knowledge.

As the previous chapters of this study have shown, circumstantial support for such a theory of Rabi'a's influence can be found in the earliest accounts about Rabi'a related by Burjulani, Muhasibi, Jahiz, and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur. As stated in Chapter 1, the depictions given in these accounts come as close as one can get to the "real" Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. What makes them different from later accounts is that Sufi narrative forms were not likely to have shaped their contents. Jahiz and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur were not Sufis, and although Muhasibi and Burjulani were Sufis, they were still close to the early ascetic and ethical traditions of Islam and hence were not affected by later Sufi narrative tropes. Most, if not all, of their accounts about Rabi'a came from traditions that originated in the city of Basra and its environs. As such, whatever tropes they contained were more likely the byproducts of local memory than the result of literary artifice. As Jan Vansina has demonstrated, such orally derived traditions can be taken

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[127] Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, 215; for some unknown reason, Smith does not cite Isfahani as the source for this quotation. Instead, she incorrectly attributes it to Muhasibi and mentions the quotation by Dhu al-Nun al-Misri that follows it in the Isfahani passage as if it too came from Muhasibi. Apparently, Smith misread these statements in the *Hilya*, thinking incorrectly that they were in Muhasibi's voice rather than Isfahani's.

as historical evidence so long as it is not forgotten that it is, in Vansina's words, "evidence at second, third, or nth remove."[128] Thus, the picture that emerges from such evidence, although it may be blurry, is more empirical than the sharper image painted by myth.

The essential asceticism that is reflected in the image of Rabi'a represented by these accounts is important to more than just the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic. It is also important to the tropes of Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Lover, and Rabi'a the Sufi. The key concept that links all of these tropes together is the notion of essential knowledge through God (*al-ma'rifa bi-llah*). Rabi'a has remained a famous figure in Sufi literature in part because her teachings stress the centrality of God as the source of all forms of knowledge. In Sufi narratives she personifies in turn the essence of asceticism, which is devotion, the essence of devotion, which is Love, and the essence of Love, which is knowledge. The metaphor of the heart, which is also depicted as important to her teachings, symbolizes essential knowledge because it is the dwelling place of both the love of God and spiritual knowledge. When one combines Rabi'a's alleged statements on the heart with Abu Sulayman al-Darani's doctrine of states of the heart, one is well on the way to developing the type of Sufi personality theory that would later become famous in the works of Muhasibi. Although one can only speculate on the full extent of the historical Rabi'a's influence on Muhasibi and other early figures of Sufism, evidence of such a possibility is clearly present in the textual fragments of hagiography and oral tradition that come from the early sources.

In his book *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Pierre Hadot criticizes Michel Foucault for anachronistically ascribing modern "technologies of the self" to figures of antiquity.[129] Although Hadot is unclear about what he means by this critique, presumably he is referring to Foucault's argument that the Greco-Roman world witnessed the growth of an "individualism" (Foucault properly puts this term in quotation marks) that "accorded more and more importance to the 'private' aspects of existence, to the values of personal conduct, and to the interest that people focused on themselves."[130] Although I am not convinced that Hadot understood Foucault correctly, I do believe that a similar charge of anachronism can be leveled at modern writers (discussed in Chapter 6) who see Rabi'a as the embodiment of modern concepts of self and personhood such as individualism, self-expression, and autonomy.

In his important study of the philosophical concept of the self from antiquity to modern times, Richard Sorabji shows that the self has been conceived in many different ways. Although all forms of selfhood involve some sense of "me and me again," this does not mean that people have always viewed themselves as individuals are viewed today.[131] This realization is important in assessing the impact of a tropological figure such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. As a literary construct she displays not an individual self but a universalized set of character traits. Even when she appears outside of the genre of Sufi writings, as in the works of Jahiz and Ibn Abi Tahir

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[128] Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 69

[129] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 206-7; on the concept of "technologies of the self," see Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton eds., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16-40.

[130] Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality Volume 3*, Robert Hurley, trans. (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1986), 41

[131] See Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), especially "The Varieties of Self and Philosophical Development of the Idea," 32-56.

Tayfur, we still only see Rabi'a the *figure* but not Rabi'a the *person*. Because she exists today only as a figure of literature, Rabi'a the person must always remain, as Pierre Hadot says of Socrates, *atopos*: "unclassifiable."[132] When Rabi'a states in *Qut al-qulub*, "I do not worship God out of fear of God. If I did, I would be like the disobedient slave-girl who only works when she is afraid," this is not the quotation of an autonomous individual. Rather, it is an example of the literary trope of the *persona*, which ultimately goes back to the Platonic and Stoic notions of the self as the expression of an ideal character type. With the notion of self-as-persona, a figure puts on a character type as one puts on a set of clothes. As Sorabji demonstrates, in classical times (and by extension in premodern Islam where these notions were used as well) writers used representations of the self to create an image of their subjects that conformed to noble or heroic ideal types.[133] In such cases, the ideal character type, not the private self, was what mattered the most. In this type of representation, there is no way to distinguish a character's "real self" from the literary persona. Indeed, for those who adhered to this ethic the real self *was* the persona. To paraphrase Hayden White, with respect to a persona, the content is the same as the form.

The same can also be said for all of the depictions of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya that appear in Islamic literature. In whatever trope she appears, all we can see is the persona, not the individual person in the modern sense of the word. Although I stated at the beginning of this chapter that I have come to see a real person emerging out of the Rabi'a narratives, all that I meant to convey by this statement was that a real person known as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya probably lived in the city of Basra or its environs in the eighth century CE. I cannot claim that a real *personality* emerges from the Rabi'a narratives, even in the earliest ones. If her real personality was in fact different from her persona we would not be able to see it. The great irony of the figure of Rabi'a the Sufi is that her individuality— that which makes her unique— lies in her universalizability, not in her individuality. Her example is meant in part to teach future generations that since our personas are formed by our roles in life, if we want to acquire a better persona we need to take on a better role. As we shall see in the next two chapters, with respect to the reality of her personhood, there is simply no way of knowing where the Rabi'a of myth ends and the Rabi'a of "real life" begins.

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[132] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 57; as noted in Chapter 1, Socrates is for Hadot the classic example of a figure whose literary persona has become indistinguishable from real life.
[133] Sorabji, *Self*, 157-171

CHAPTER 5

RABI'A THE ICON (I): THE SUFI IMAGE

All classical culture lived for centuries on the notion that reality could in no way contaminate verisimilitude; first of all because verisimilitude is never anything but *opinable*: it is entirely subject to (public) opinion; as Nicole said: 'One must not consider things as they are in themselves, nor as they are known to be by one who speaks or writes, but only in relation to what is known of them by those who read and hear' . . . In verisimilitude, the contrary is never impossible, since notation rests on a majority, but not an absolute opinion. The motto implicit on the threshold of all classical discourse (subject to the ancient idea of verisimilitude) is: *Esto* (*Let there be, suppose . . .*).
— Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *The Rustle of Language*, 147

I. RABI'A REMEMBERED: MYTH, ICON, AND THE "REALITY EFFECT"

The previous chapter introduced Roland Barthes' concept of "the reality effect" (*l'effet du réel*) to the study of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. This concept, which I took from an essay by Elizabeth A. Clark, was used as an analytical tool to demonstrate how the trope of Rabi'a the Sufi became so fixed in the historical memory of Sufism that doctrines that were developed in later periods were read back anachronistically into Rabi'a's time. The reality effect was also important to the development of the trope of Rabi'a the Lover. In strictly historical terms, whether the "real" Rabi'a could even be called a Sufi is open to question. In addition, although the earliest extant quotation of Rabi'a is about her love of God, the Love mysticism that she eventually came to personify was more a product of the tenth century CE when Abu Talib al-Makki wrote about her than of her own era. As Barthes explains in an essay that introduces the reality effect, in some master narratives the "paper time" of the reality effect replaces chronological time with "a reminiscence or a nostalgia, a complex, parametric, non-linear time whose deep space recalls the mythic time of the ancient cosmogonies."[1] Tropes such as Rabi'a the Sufi and Rabi'a the Lover constitute what Barthes calls "referential illusions." Referential illusions are literary constructs that take on the appearance of reality and create a shift in historical memory. For Barthes, because referential illusions take on the appearance of facts, they are comparable to myths; thus, the writers that use them can be viewed as agents of myth.[2]

Most scholars who use the concept of the reality effect take the concept from Barthes' essay, "L'Effet du Réel," in his book *Communications* (1968). However, this was not the first use of this concept. Barthes first introduced the reality effect a year earlier in the essay, "Le Discours de l'Histoire," in *Informations sur les sciences sociales* (1967).[3] This earlier essay provides a better understanding of the reality effect than the essay in *Communications* because it discusses the concept from the perspective of the theory of discourse. This approach allows one

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[1] Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History," in idem, *The Rustle of Language*, 130-131
[2] Ibid, 131-2
[3] Translated as "The Discourse of History" in idem, *The Rustle of Language*, 127-140.

to draw a comparison between Barthes' concept of the reality effect and the ideas of Hayden White. Both Barthes and White use the linguistic theories of Roman Jakobson to conduct a structural analysis "of the universals of discourse . . . in the form of units and general rules of combination."[4] Both theorists also separate the narrative *form* of discourse from its content and assert that the form of discourse provides new content on a meta-level that can be found within the structures (i.e., the "units and general rules") of historical writing. What White calls the "content of the form" can be found in what Barthes calls the "thematic units" of discourse that underlie historical narratives. White refers to these units as "tropes," as in the title of his book *Tropics of Discourse*. Although tropes can be found in all historical narratives, for Barthes they are especially prominent in premodern narratives that do not fit modern Western definitions of "objective history."[5] According to Barthes, this more "fluid" approach to narrative is a common characteristic of premodern historical writing. Among the genres of premodern historical writing, none was more "fluid" and thus susceptible to tropological construction than the genre of hagiography or sacred biography.

Thomas J. Heffernan, who popularized the concept of sacred biography in sainthood studies, defines this genre of literature as "a narrative text of the *vita* of the saint written by a member of the community of belief. The text provides a documentary witness to the process of sanctification for the community and in so doing becomes itself a part of the sacred tradition it serves to document."[6] Clearly, many of the writings dedicated to the memory of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, both premodern and modern, can be characterized as sacred biography according to Heffernan's definition. It should also be evident that the narratives that make up sacred biography depend to a large extent on the reality effect as defined by Roland Barthes. In fact, Heffernan discusses the interpretation of sacred biography in semiotic terms that are very reminiscent of Barthes: "Narrative in this genre is primarily a medium for symbolic representation, since the essential thing (*res*) being signified (the presence of the divine in the saint) exists outside a system where sign and signified can be empirically validated. It follows that our reading and interpretation of such narrative should take seriously its symbolizing structures."[7] According to this statement, it seems that Barthes and Heffernan are saying the same thing.

However, on closer examination one can see that this is not actually the case. Heffernan's approach to historiography is not based on the analysis of narrative structures, as Barthes' is. Instead, Heffernan's view of sacred biography is based on the French *Annales* tradition of social history, which regards hagiographic texts as *documents* rather than as literature. An important assumption of this perspective is the belief that hagiographic accounts are not myths. According to Heffernan, hagiographic texts provide "documentary witness" to social attitudes and mentalities that exist outside of the text itself. Even if one cannot objectively prove the miracles of saints, some form of objective truth is still present beyond the text. In *Annales*-type studies of sainthood, the empirically unverifiable reality of the divine acting through the saint is replaced by the empirically verifiable reality of public opinion as expressed through the

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[4] Ibid, 127

[5] Ibid, 134

[6] Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York and Oxford, U. K.: Oxford University Press, 1988), 16

[7] Ibid, 11

contents of the hagiographic text. In Heffernan's words, the reality of public opinion is "witnessed" by the text, which is to be read by the modern historian as a social document. Thus, for Heffernan, the hagiographic text reflects a socially generated image of the saint. The historical "truth" of a saint like Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is not to be found in the details of her *vita* but rather in how the community views her in the image that it constructs of her. In this type of historiography, the literary form of the hagiographic text, which is so important for Barthes and White, is less important than the public perception of celebrity or reputation.

       While the *Annales*-based historiography of Thomas Heffernan deserves much credit for helping to open sacred biography to systematic study, it only tells part of the story. It is very important that hagiographic texts provide insights about local theologies, worldviews, and social relations; these should neither be overlooked nor trivialized. However it should also be recognized that the stories in sacred biographical texts can *create* public opinion as well as reflect it. To illustrate this point, I will give an example from personal experience. In 2007, I was at a conference in Morocco that was attended by Iraqi scholars from the Al-Khoie Foundation in London. While most of these scholars were from Baghdad, two of them were from Basra. During one of the breaks in the conference, I informed them of my research on Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and asked if any of them knew the location of Rabi'a's tomb in Basra. Since the site of Basra in Rabi'a's time was some distance away from the city of Basra today, a heated discussion took place in which several locations around Basra were mentioned as possible sites of the tomb. Unfortunately, I did not write down the names of these locations at the time and forgot about them until about six months later. At that time, I tried to contact the scholars from Basra again to see if they could recall the places that they had mentioned. The reply I received was surprising. Not only had these scholars forgotten the locations that they had discussed at the conference but they referred me to the text of *Wafayat al-a'yan* (Death Notices of the Notables), a thirteenth-century biographical dictionary by the Syrian historian Ibn Khallikan (d. 1282 CE). As we shall see later in this chapter, Ibn Khallikan conflated stories of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Damascus and claimed that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's tomb was not in Basra but in Jerusalem. Differently from before, the scholars from Basra now insisted that Rabi'a was buried in Jerusalem. Because of Ibn Khallikan's authoritative reputation, they were willing to take the clearly mistaken claims of *Wafayat al-a'yan* over local knowledge and more verifiable historical accounts that placed the tomb of Rabi'a in the Basra region.

       Jerusalem is not the only alternative site for Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's tomb. Some accounts have her buried in Egypt and a tomb ascribed to Rabi'a can be seen today in Cairo. Other sites exist as well, including tombs in Damascus and Afghanistan. We have already seen in the previous chapters that the earliest accounts about Rabi'a locate both her residence and her burial place in the region of Basra. However, as Barthes states in the epigraph to this chapter, empirically verifiable truth is largely irrelevant to narratives that become myths. *Verisimilitude* is what matters most. With myths, Barthes says, "one must consider things only in relation to what is known of them by those who read and hear." This maxim helps explain the story of my encounter with the scholars from Basra. For these scholars, the verisimilitude or reality effect of a historically incorrect account in well-known medieval text from Syria was so great that it caused them to forget the location of a tomb that is somewhere in the vicinity of their own city. To this day, I still have not found anyone from Basra who can tell me exactly where Rabi'a is

buried. This does not mean that her burial place does not exist.[8] However, it does illustrate the power of sacred biography to create public opinion, even at the expense of local traditions that are likely to be more accurate.

In Barthes' terminology, the misplacement of Rabi'a's tomb by the scholars of Basra was due to a "referential illusion" that shifted the structure of the Rabi'a narrative so much that the illusion took the place of better-established historical evidence. The authoritativeness of the Syrian Ibn Khallikan's narrative was greater than that of local knowledge, even for these Iraqi residents of Rabi'a's home city. To put it another way, for these scholars, Rabi'a the literary myth was indistinguishable from the Rabi'a of history.

In Barthes' terminology, the reality effect is the result of a dialectical process in which "the extrusion of the signified outside the 'objective' discourse" leads to a confrontation between the "real" and its alternative expression. This confrontation results in a new meaning that is taken for the "real" itself. Because historical memory partly depends on the reality effect of narratives, for Barthes, "historical discourse does not follow the real, it merely signifies it, constantly repeating *this happened*, without this assertion ever being anything but the signified *wrong side* of all historical narration."[9]

In the historiography of the Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya narratives, the most important text to establish the reality effect of "this happened" was the chapter on Rabi'a in Farid al-Din al-'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* (Memorial of the Saints). Since the time of its publication at the beginning of the thirteenth century CE, the narratives in 'Attar's text have influenced most subsequent versions of Rabi'a's life, including modern works of historical scholarship. 'Attar's depiction of Rabi'a is thus significant historically because it has become the foundational text for most subsequent versions of the Rabi'a myth. For most Muslims even today, the truth of 'Attar's version of Rabi'a's life has become so obvious as to require neither comment nor critique. In Barthes' terminology, it inhabits the domain of the "falsely obvious."[10]

Barthes' book *Mythologies* (1957) is useful as an introduction to the myths that constitute the Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya narrative because unlike many students of myth, he attempts to separate myth from religion. For Barthes, myth is the expression of "what goes without saying" in an historical narrative. In other words, it is a type of meta-discourse in which meaning is transformed into a literary image.[11] Religious myths are a subset of this broader concept.[12] Barthes' approach to myth is useful for the analysis of the Rabi'a myth because although Rabi'a

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[8] A history of Basra on the Iraqi web site *'Ashiqat al-ward* (Lover of Roses) claims that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's grave can be found in the cemetery adjoining the tomb of al-Hasan al-Basri in the suburb of al-Zubayr, which was the site of Basra in Rabi'a's time. Also in this cemetery are said to be the graves of Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya, Maryam of Basra, Shu'ba ibn al-Hajjaj, and the Umayyad-era poet al-Farazdaq. See *al-Basra al-fayha': ta'rikh wa hadarat al-'arab* (Basra the Fragrant: History and Culture of the Arabs), 8-9, http://www.a3ashk.com/vb/showthread.php?t=529.

[9] Barthes, "The Discourse of History," 139; italics in the original

[10] Roland Barthes, 1957 Introduction to *Mythologies*, Annette Lavers, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 11; I agree with Barthes' term "falsely obvious" only in a strictly empirical sense: I recognize that the stories and statements that 'Attar attributed to Rabi'a are important examples of spiritual wisdom and "truth," regardless of who authored them.

[11] Ibid, 11 and 131

[12] Barthes discusses only one religious myth in *Mythologies*: The Iconography of Abbé Pierre (47-49). All of the other myths in this book are secular, and include such subjects as The World of Wrestling, Romans in Films, The Poor and the Proletariat, and The Brain of Einstein.

al-'Adawiyya was a religious figure, the myths that are connected with her all began as literary narratives.[13] These include the four "thematic units" or tropes of the Rabi'a narrative discussed in the previous chapters: Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, Rabi'a the Lover, and Rabi'a the Sufi. In fact, for some early non-Sufi writers such as Jahiz and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, one may even question whether the religious aspect of the Rabi'a myth was important at all. For these writers she was not a religious figure per se but a more general exemplar of ethical or rhetorical ideal-types. For Jahiz in particular, Rabi'a's importance was purely literary: she was important for him only in so far as she helped him make a rhetorical point. In the next chapter we shall see that the modern Egyptian philosopher and historian 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi made use of Rabi'a in much the same way.

Another theorist whose approach to myth is useful for the study of the Rabi'a myth is the Russian philosopher and historian Aleksei Fyodorovich Losev (1893-1988). Although Losev was one of the most important Russian intellectuals of the twentieth century, he remains largely unknown in the West because his works were banned by the Soviet Union for more than 50 years. Losev's first book was on the subject of myth. This work, *The Dialectics of Myth* (1930), was banned by the Soviet government because of its reliance on philosophical idealism and phenomenology, along with its advocacy of Russian Orthodox mysticism.[14]

Losev approaches myth much like Barthes, but his framework for analysis is phenomenological rather than linguistic. However, both scholars are more interested in the structure of myth than in its contents. Also like Barthes, Losev does not consider myth to be an exclusively religious phenomenon: "Myth as such, pure mythical nature as such, does not necessarily have to be religious in principle . . . Religion brings into myth a specific content that makes it a religious myth, but the *structure* of myth itself by no means depends on whether it is filled with religious or some other content."[15] Losev further agrees with Barthes that myth is expressive. However, for Losev myth is expressive primarily in a phenomenological sense: "Myth is not the substantial, but an *energistic* self-affirmation of a person. It is the assertion of a person not in her deepest and ultimate root, but in her *manifestational* and *expressive* functions."[16]

As the phrase, "pure mythical nature," implies, Losev also differs from Barthes in his idealism. This was partly due to his deep religious belief in a mystical form of Russian

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[13] Two recent and well-regarded Religious Studies works on myth completely overlook the contribution of narrative theory (whether by Barthes or anyone else) to this field. Robert A. Segal, *Theorizing about Myth* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999) restricts its analysis to the fields of Religion and the Anthropology of Religion. And despite the use of the word, "narrative," in the title, Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), mostly ignores narrative theory and never mentions Barthes. Neither of these works is thus of much value for the study of the narrative construction of myth in Sufi or other hagiographic texts.

[14] See the biography of Losev in the Introduction to Aleksei Fyodorovich Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, Vladimir Marchenkov, trans. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 1-15. After publishing this work, Losev was arrested and condemned to a labor camp. He soon became blind and was lucky to survive his ordeal. In 1931 Maxim Gorky criticized Losev for being a "blind, insane, and illiterate professor who had failed to die in a timely fashion" (14). Ironically, his sentence was suspended in 1933 at the intercession of Gorky's wife, who was then the head of the Soviet Red Cross.

[15] Ibid, 92; the italics in this and other quotations come from the published text.

[16] Ibid, 93

Orthodoxy.[17] According to Losev, when a person is turned into a mythical figure, she becomes an idealized image: "Myth is a *depiction* of a person, i.e., her pictorial emanation, her image."[18] However, this image is not a philosophical ideal but a phenomenon— she is an idealized expression. As phenomena, both the myth and the person behind the myth coexist at the same time. Some form of reality, no matter how indistinct it may be, remains behind the image. "Myth is not a person as such, but her face; and this means that the face is inseparable from the person, i.e., myth is inseparable from her."[19] If Losev's phenomenology of myth were applied to the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, one could say that the "face" of Rabi'a — the mythical identity that she possesses— has become the "reality" of Rabi'a over time. Because of this, her mythical "face" is seen by those who revere her as expressing objective reality, no matter how much contrary evidence is provided. As part of what Losev calls "myth in history," every new narrative depiction of Rabi'a engages dialectically with previous narratives as part of a hermeneutic process in which new "faces" or identities are generated without ever fully resolving the contradiction between the myth and the person behind the myth.

However, behind this play of faces or masks, a phenomenologically "real" person can still be said to exist, even if she is not empirically real. For Losev this explains the verisimilitude of the myth as icon, which, in the case of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, comprises her literary and public images together. Apart from what she symbolizes for Sufi writers, Rabi'a is also an icon for millions of ordinary Muslims.   Even the Egyptian atheist and Existentialist philosopher 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi was able to see a certain reality behind the Rabi'a myth, although he could not accept her religious meaning. In his book *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi* (The Martyr of Divine Love), Badawi tells about his visit to the tomb ascribed to Rabi'a in Damascus in December 1947. He describes how an old man who had been devoted to the tomb for over 50 years insisted to him that Rabi'a protected the neighborhood of the tomb from French bombs during the Damascus revolt of 1925. Badawi acknowledges the phenomenological reality of this "face" of Rabi'a when he exclaims at the end of this story, "And still the memory (*dhikra*) of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya lives on universally in the souls of the people of Damascus and Syria!"[20]

Losev describes the verisimilitude of myth in a way that seems to prefigure Barthes' discussion of the reality effect. However, he avoids using biased expressions such as "the falsely obvious," which reveal Barthes' secular skepticism of mythological representations. Instead, for Losev, each "face" of the mythical image is real in its own way:

> Dialectics demands a *simultaneous* recognition that a person is *identical* to her manifestations and energies, and at once *different* from them. There is *one* thing, *one and the same thing*— a person with living functions, but this does not prevent the person as such being different from her own states and energies . . . The face, the mythical visage,

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[17] Losev was suspected by the Soviets of "Onomatodoxy." This term refers to a sect of Russian Orthodoxy devoted to the recitation of the Divine Name, and which advocated martyrdom over submission to Soviet rule. Even after his release from the labor camps, Losev continued to be anathematized as a "militant mystic." After his wife's death it was revealed that the two of them had secretly taken monastic vows and lived together in celibacy. See Ibid, 7 and 13-14

[18] Ibid, 93

[19] Ibid

[20] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 100; viewed in historical terms, the "real" Rabi'a could never have been buried in this Damascus tomb.

is inseparable from the person and is therefore the person herself. But the person herself is different from her own mythical visages, and therefore she is neither her own face, nor her own myth, nor these mythical visages.[21]

In other words, for Losev the mythical image of a saint such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya acts as an *icon*. When reading or listening to a narrative about Rabi'a, the hagiographer's audience contemplates (or venerates) the literary image of Rabi'a much as one would contemplate (or venerate) the painted icon of a saint in a Russian Orthodox church. The Lebanese writer Widad El Sakkakini looks at Rabi'a in much the same way when she states, "I am looking at Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as if through eternity, or at the door of the infinite. In her right hand, she is holding a thick book of pages without blemish, the first of which she is about to turn. She goes over it contemplatively and tenderly."[22] This figural representation is not the same as the "real" person that the icon depicts, but it is not completely different from her either. Especially when one contemplates the iconic image of Rabi'a through hagiographic narratives, one "sees" the spiritual reality that each narrative represents.

In certain ways, Losev's view of myth is similar to the Dutch theologian Hendrik M. Vroom's notion of how religious stories cause us to "see otherwise," or better yet, to "see more truly."[23] This insight is what lies behind Losev's contention that the iconic representation of a mythical figure like Rabi'a or an Orthodox Christian saint is not an empirically "real" person but is not unreal either. Using the biblical story of David and Bathsheba as an example, Vroom argues that religious stories or myths make truth claims on four different levels simultaneously: *historical truth claims* relate an allegedly historical event; *fictional truth claims* tell the story not as it empirically occurred but "as what could have happened in order to yield insight;"[24] *moral truth claims* provide the background lesson, or the "moral" of the story; and *religious truth claims* provide insight into the story as it is connected to God. The crucial point is that none of these truth claims can be separated from the others without doing harm to the insights that the whole story provides. The fact that a religious story is empirically fictional (i.e., that an event did not happen in precisely the way that the historical truth claim asserts) makes no difference to the moral and religious truth claims of the story. The insights that they provide are still real. In fact, with respect to these latter claims, the meaning of the fictional story is likely to be "truer" than what actually did or did not happen. Losev would not have disagreed with this assertion. Unlike the ideologically secular Barthes, he was deeply religious and suffered decades of persecution for persisting against Soviet Communism in his Russian Orthodox beliefs. He would have been the last person to claim that the mythical image of a saint portrayed by hagiography was less important than the "historical person."

The key concepts in Losev's theory of myth are *visage, form, image,* and *outline*. However, unlike Thomas Heffernan's notion that sainthood is a reflection of public opinion, for

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[21] Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, 93

[22] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 9; in the original Arabic text Rabi'a turns the first page of the Book of Life with her left hand, forewhadowing the life of bondage and sexuality that El Sakkakini imagines her to have lived in her youth (see below). Idem, *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 10

[23] See Hendrik M. Vroom, "Religious Truth: Seeing Things As They Really Are, Experience, Insight, and Religious Stories," in Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin, *The Question of Theological Truth: Philosophical and Interreligious Perspectives* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi Press, 2012), 115-135.

[24] Ibid, 128

Losev, "Myth is in no sense any kind of reflection. It is always a manifestation, immediate and naïve reality, a seen and tangibly felt sculptural quality of life."[25] For the *Annales*-influenced historian Heffernan, the theologies that provide the religious truth claims of sainthood are dogmatic: they act as models for how the saint is supposed to be perceived. For Losev, myth is not dogmatic but creative. Dogma, which is the absolutization of myth, stands outside of time. Myth, however, is part of time because it expresses a form of becoming.

To illustrate the historical aspect of myth, Losev uses the example of the Russian myth of the blossoming fern on St. John's Eve. For the Russian Orthodox believer, this fern can help find hidden treasures, open iron doors, and do other extraordinary things. Yet if one takes away the "historical" moment of Saint John's Eve, the fern becomes like any other object, "any stone lying along the road with other refuse."[26] For Losev, the association of the myth with an historical memory shows that the myth of the blossoming fern is inseparable from history. On any other day, the fern ceases to be meaningful. As Vroom might say, part of its meaning lies in its historical truth claim: it refers to a miracle story of St. John. According to Losev, for a myth to be truly meaningful, it must have a historical context, even if that context only exists in what Barthes would call "paper time." In a similar way, the meaning of the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is also grounded in both its historical and fictional truth claims: in Losev's terminology it is a story traced through the *visages, forms, images,* and *outlines* of narrative depictions that portray Rabi'a the Icon at different moments in time.

This chapter and the next will examine the trope of Rabi'a the Icon in two key versions of the Rabi'a myth. The present chapter will examine the highly influential *vita* of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya composed by the Sufi Farid al-Din al-'Attar (d. 1220). Chapter 6 will examine the revision of 'Attar's *vita* of Rabi'a by the secular Egyptian historian and Existentialist philosopher 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi (1917-2002) and the dramatic use of Badawi's depiction of Rabi'a by a feminist writer and Egyptian filmmakers. Each of these depictions corresponds to a particular moment in the historical development of the Rabi'a myth. As Roland Barthes has noted, the stories recounted in myths do not rely primarily on empirical facts but on verisimilitude. The myth of Rabi'a lives on in the present, "uncontaminated by reality" as Barthes would say, because its verisimilitude is reinforced by public opinion. On this point, Barthes and Heffernan would agree. The public judges the truth of a myth neither on the basis of empirical facts nor on all that may be said or written about the person behind the myth but in relation to what resonates best with the basic experiences of the audience. As Hendrik Vroom rightly points out, these experiences determine the truth of the insights contained in religious stories or myths. However, it is also important to remember that in the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya *everything* that the public knows about her first appeared in a literary text. As Losev would say, the dialectics of myth in sainthood narratives are found at the points of contact between sacred biography and its audience, where the *visages* or *forms* of verisimilitude are generated and revised. As we shall see in these two chapters, Rabi'a the Icon appears in both Sufi and secular literature as an unfolding series of images on successive pages of "paper time" that are bound together in a never-ending process of identity formation and reformation. The purpose of these chapters is to explicate the development of these identities in "paper time."

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[25] Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, 100

[26] Ibid, 101-2

II. FROM VISAGE TO *VITA*: 'ATTAR'S OUTLINE OF THE RABI'A MYTH

a. *Composing Rabi'a's Image: 'Attar's Hagiographic Predecessors*

In the premodern historiography of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, three Sufi authors stand out for developing the most durable tropes of the Rabi'a myth. The first of these is Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 996 CE), who was primarily responsible for the trope of Rabi'a the Lover. As we saw in Chapter 3, developing this trope did not mean that Makki was the first to associate Rabi'a with Love mysticism. This connection was established in the ninth century CE by the early Sufi al-Harith al-Muhasibi. However, Makki took Muhasibi's and other early accounts about Rabi'a and reinterpreted them in light of the Platonically inspired Love theory that was popular in the intellectual and court circles of the Abbasid capital of Baghdad. By portraying Rabi'a in his book *Qut al-qulub* as a sort of Muslim Diotima, he could highlight the mystical elements of Plato's Love theory and weave them into his own theory of Sufi knowledge. In a way that was similar to previously established patterns in the works of Plotinus and early Christian mystics, Makki combined Platonic Love theory with the well-known trope of the heart as the seat of the spiritual intellect and made Love the key to the knowledge of God through mystical union. By using the figure of Rabi'a to symbolize the station of Love, he not only established her reputation among the highest ranks of Love mystics in Islam but also enshrined her as the chief representative of this tradition. Whatever her actual teachings might have been, Rabi'a's mythical visage henceforth would always include the trope of Rabi'a the Lover.

The second Sufi author to add important elements to the Rabi'a myth was Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021 CE). Although Sulami has long been known as an important early hagiographer and writer on Sufi doctrines, his reputation has increased in recent years due to the edition and publication of many of his works. We now know that his doctrinal works were Sufi "best-sellers" in his time and that he was one of the most influential early theorists of Sufism.[27] Although Sulami disapproved of ordinary women, he believed that Sufi women merited what feminist scholars have called a "hermeneutic of remembrance" so that their contributions to Islamic spirituality would be recognized. As women, they were more likely to be misunderstood and their teachings were likely to be overlooked. Sulami's solution for this problem was to publish a hagiographic memorial of Sufi women, *Dhikr al-niswa al-muta'abbidat al-sufiyyat* (Memorial of Female Sufi Devotees). I have referred to this work many times in the preceding chapters.

Significantly, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is the first Sufi woman to be mentioned in Sulami's book. By highlighting her in this way, he created another important image for the Rabi'a myth: Rabi'a the Iconic Sufi Woman. This too was not a new development. Makki could not have depicted Rabi'a the Lover as a Muslim Diotima unless he also thought of her as an important Sufi. Likewise, Sulami also took an established image of Rabi'a and embellished it with a new interpretation. For Sulami, Rabi'a was the paradigm of the theology of servitude that he proposed as the defining characteristic of Sufi women.[28]

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[27] On the popularity of Sulami's works in his time see al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Ta'rikh Baghdad*, vol. 2, 245.

[28] For a detailed discussion of Sulami's theology of servitude, see R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 54-60.

For Rabi'a and the other Sufi women who represented this model of spirituality, becoming a "slave of God" (fem. *amat Allah*) was the first step in becoming a "friend of God" (*wali Allah*) or Muslim saint. The ascetic and devotional acts that they performed enabled them to overcome the limitations of their female natures. As Sulami illustrates, early Sufi women could travel without a chaperone, mix in social gatherings with men, teach men privately and in public, and develop themselves intellectually in ways that were impossible for other women. Most importantly, it was no longer possible for male critics to claim that Sufi women were deficient in religion and intellect like other women.[29] By means of the theology of servitude, the highest degrees of spiritual knowledge were accessible to them. As Surayra, a Sufi woman of the mid-tenth century states in Sulami's book, "When servitude (*'ubudiyya*) vanishes, only lordship (*rububiyya*) remains."[30]

The notion that Sufi women approached God through a theology of servitude allows Sulami's image of Rabi'a to be contrasted doctrinally with that of Makki. In Makki's depiction of Rabi'a, her devotion to the Divine Beloved and intimate access to God's secrets are aspects of a spiritual path in which knowledge of God is based on Love. However, for Sulami Rabi'a is not primarily a Love mystic as she is for Makki. Instead, Sulami's Rabi'a is more of an ethicist or moralist, which brings her closer to the depictions of non-Sufi writers such as Jahiz and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur (see Chapter 1). However, this does not mean that Sulami completely ignores the trope of Rabi'a the Lover. In one account he even describes her as being inebriated from the love of God. However, he subordinates the trope of Rabi'a the Lover to that of Rabi'a the Teacher, much as Plato did for Diotima in *The Symposium*.

Besides portraying Rabi'a as the iconic Sufi Woman, Sulami also played a major role in developing two other tropes. The first of these is the trope of Rabi'a the Slave, which, as we shall see, was made into a major part of the Rabi'a myth by Farid al-Din al-'Attar. Sulami takes the first step in this direction by claiming that Rabi'a was a client (fem. *mawlat*) of the Arab clan of Al 'Atik.[31] We saw in Chapter 1 that the institution of *muwalat* or personal clientage was the most common means by which non-Arabs became Muslims from the period of the first Islamic conquests through the end of the Umayyad dynasty (ca. 634-750 CE). Because many *mawali* were freed slaves or the Muslim-born children of slaves, it is easy to see how Sulami's assertion could develop into the notion that Rabi'a herself was a slave. In addition, this trope may have been reinforced by the conflation of *muwalat* servitude with Sulami's theology of servitude, such that Rabi'a the Slave of God became Rabi'a the Slave of Man.

The third contribution of Sulami to the Rabi'a myth was his enhancement of the trope of Rabi'a the Sufi by stressing her knowledge of God over her other spiritual attributes. By highlighting this aspect of Rabi'a's identity, Sulami sought to reinforce the notion that Sufism was primarily a way of knowledge. As discussed in Chapter 4, each of the visages that make up the composite image of Rabi'a the Sufi depends on the notion that she knew God intimately. By

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[29] This notion was based in part on a famous hadith in the collection of Bukhari. See Rkia E. Cornell, "'Soul of A Woman Was Created Below': Woman as the Lower Soul (*Nafs*) in Islam," in Jerald D. Gort, Henry Jansen, and Hendrik M. Vroom editors, *Probing the Depths of Evil and Good: Multireligious Views and Case Studies* (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2007), 257-280.

[30] R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 246-7; Surayra also said, "The greatest cause of God's disapproval is the inability to understand."

[31] Ibid, *Early Sufi Women*, 74-5. It was demonstrated in Chapter 1 that this claim by Sulami is factually mistaken.

portraying Rabi'a as a mystic who knew God better than her contemporaries, Sulami demonstrated that she was equal in rank to the male Sufis that he memorialized in *Tabaqat al-Sufiyya* (Generations of the Sufis), the hagiographic anthology that he devoted to men.[32] In his Book of Sufi Women he portrays Rabi'a as a master of most of the moral and spiritual virtues associated with male Sufis, including truthfulness, critical self-awareness, devotion to God, and profound doctrinal knowledge.

However, in his portrayal of Rabi'a the Sufi, Sulami does not attempt to obscure her gender, nor does he assert, as 'Attar would later do, that she should be regarded as an honorary man. Unlike other Sufi women in his book, who are identified as teachers by the masculine term *ustadh*, Rabi'a the Teacher is identified by the feminine term *mu'addiba* (female trainer). She also exhibits clichéd female traits such as weeping and expressing her love for God emotionally. However, Sulami does not portray these traits as necessarily signs of weakness, nor do they diminish Rabi'a's reputation as a Sufi teacher. Her weeping is not for herself but for others and her love for God is not only a matter of emotion but is also part of a developed form of Love mysticism. The overall impression that is left by Sulami's portrayal of Rabi'a is of a wise, independent, and self-confident spiritual master who remains a woman despite taking on roles that are normally associated with men. Her value for Sufism is proven by the fact that as a woman she is accepted in a man's world.

This image was to change among later generations of Muslim writers. In fact, an important difference between the earliest portrayals of Rabi'a, which culminate in the eleventh-century writings of Sulami, Kharkushi, and Ghazali, and later medieval portrayals, which begin toward the end of the twelfth century, is that later writers are more explicitly concerned with Rabi'a's femininity. One of the first of this later group of hagiographers was the Hanbali theologian Jamal al-Din ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201 CE). Ibn al-Jawzi's highly gendered portrayal of Rabi'a stands in marked contrast to that of Sulami and his predecessors, who were less concerned with highlighting gender distinctions. Unlike Sulami, who is not worried about the sexuality of Sufi women because their spiritual vocation makes them immune to women's deficiencies, Ibn al-Jawzi feels the need to de-feminize Rabi'a in order to make her more acceptable to men. To do this, he depicts her as an old woman (*'ajuza*) "who looked like a shrunken, old water-skin and appeared to be on the verge of collapsing."[33]

Ibn al-Jawzi's attempt to neutralize Rabi'a's femininity by depicting her as an aged and emaciated ascetic was a rhetorical technique that had already been established by Christian hagiographers. For example, in the *vita* of St. Pelagia of Antioch attributed to Jacob of Edessa (ca. fifth century CE), the saint at the end of her life is portrayed in a way that is simiilar to Ibn al-Jawzi's depiction of Rabi'a:

> I failed to recognize her because she had lost those good looks I used to know; her astounding beauty had all faded away, her laughing and bright face that I had known had become ugly, her pretty eyes had become hollow and cavernous as the result of much fasting and the keeping of vigils. The joints of her holy bones, all fleshless, were visible beneath her skin through emaciation brought on by ascetic practices. Indeed, the whole

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[32] See Sulami, *Tabaqat al-Sufiyya*.

[33] Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, in R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 276-283 and idem, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 4, 22-4. This same trope would also be used by 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi in his modern historical representation of Rabi'a.

complexion of her body was coarse and dark like sackcloth, as the result of her strenuous penance.[34]

Ibn al-Jawzi's notice on Rabi'a in *Sifat al-safwa* contains only a small portion of the accounts that he originally included in a now-lost work that was dedicated entirely to her.[35] Thus, there is presently no way of knowing if he used other tropes from Christian hagiography in his portrayal of her. Such tropes would have been available to him because the stories of early Christian women saints such as Pelagia were popular in the Eastern churches that represented Christianity in his native city of Baghdad. However, in *Sifat al-safwa* there are hints of what we might find in this lost work. For example, the theme of repentance, which is central not only to the story of Pelagia but also to the hagiographies of other Christian women ascetics such as Mary of Egypt and Thaïs of Alexandria, is more evident in Ibn al-Jawzi's narrative than in previous accounts about Rabi'a.[36] In addition, by focusing on Rabi'a's emotionalism he implies that the level of her reason or intellect was less than that of her male counterparts. He portrays Rabi'a as weeping constantly and as practicing a highly-strung form of piety that borders on hysteria.[37] Unlike Sulami, who portrays Rabi'a as the equal of men in her spiritual state, for Ibn al-Jawzi although she is unique, she remains imprisoned in what Simone de Beauvoir called "The Eternal Feminine."[38]

b. *'Attar's Portrayal of Rabi'a in* Tadhkirat al-Awliya'

The most influential Sufi author to develop key tropes of the Rabi'a myth was Farid al-Din al-'Attar (d. ca 1220 CE). Although 'Attar was born in Nishapur like Sulami, his portrayal of Rabi'a in the hagiographic anthology *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* (Memorial of the Saints) is very different from that of his predecessor. At first glance, the highly gendered tone of his chapter on Rabi'a makes it seem more similar to Ibn al-Jawzi's depiction than to Sulami's. However, 'Attar's and Ibn al-Jawzi's versions share very little in common. For a number of reasons, it is best to think of 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* as a unique and original work. First, it is the earliest hagiography of Rabi'a in the Persian language. Second, most of the stories that 'Attar relates cannot be found in any previous work. One can find bits and pieces of earlier accounts in 'Attar's chapter, but the stories in which they appear are more often than not quite different from the originals. Many stories— such as the those of Rabi'a's encounters with Hasan

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[34] Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 60

[35] R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women,* 282-3

[36] See, for example, Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1987), 26-56 and 76-84. Widad El El Sakkakini recalls the image of Thaïs in her biography of Rabi'a. Idem, *First Among Sufis*, 16

[37] R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 276-83; the themes of repentance and personal weakness are stressed so much by Ibn al-Jawzi that it is hard to avoid the impression that he believed in the concept of original sin— or at least original inadequacy— when it came to women's natures. In a way that is different from the ascetic weeping discussed in Chapter 2, Ibn al-Jawzi's Rabi'a seems to weep for the sins of all the daughters of Eve.

[38] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 4-5; for De Beauvoir, the Eternal Woman is forever imprisoned in subjectivity: "Some even say she thinks with her hormones." This is a very apt description of Ibn al-Jawzi's portrayal of Rabi'a's emotionalism.

al-Basri— are anachronistic and seem to have been invented by 'Attar himself. Another difference between previous depictions of Rabi'a and 'Attar's version is that 'Attar sometimes portrays Rabi'a as a miracle-worker. 'Attar's depiction of Rabi'a is the first in which miracles are used as proofs of her sainthood. Finally, 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a is unique because for the first time it provides a background narrative, what Losev would call an *outline*, for the Rabi'a myth. In other words, it is a true *vita* or *bios* in the Christian hagiographic sense.

'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a is also different from its antecedents because it was written both for Sufis and for the general public. His purpose in writing *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* was to popularize the institution of Sufi sainthood. This meant that the work had to be accessible to both Sufis and non-Sufis alike. Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is the only Sufi woman to be highlighted in its pages. For this reason, 'Attar is very concerned to stress how different she was from other women. His desire to portray Rabi'a as a popular icon led him to use miracle stories as proofs of her sainthood. In addition, he added commentary to tell the reader how he wanted her example understood. Because of his use of commentary and vernacular language, the level of verisimilitude ultimately attained by 'Attar's depiction of Rabi'a is unequaled by any other Sufi work before or since. For the vast majority of Muslims, including most Sufis, 'Attar's outline of Rabi'a's *vita* has become the "true" account of the life of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.

Because it was written as the outline or back-story for a myth, 'Attar's narrative of Rabi'a's life is teleological and the message it conveys is mainly theological. These aspects of 'Attar's depiction of Rabi'a are illustrated in the following quote from Jean Annestay, one of the most recent authors to be influenced by 'Attar's narrative. For Annestay, who is a follower of the Traditionalist writer Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), historical research must not be allowed to challenge the verisimilitude of a saint's *vita*. This is because the truth of a saint's life is not in the historical details of her life but in its "principial" or theological meaning:

> In such a perspective, the life of Rabi'a or of any saint, in order to be understood in all of its fullness, must not only be related to a given historical epoch but also to a strictly prehistoric or if one prefers, non-historic reality— that is to say, prior to all history and all temporality— in which it finds its principle and its end and which is its true reason for existence. It consists, if you will, of an anteriority that is neither horizontal nor temporal but vertical or principial. It is a vestige that refers back to the instantaneity of the eternal present and which can be anecdotally or literally nothing but a trace recounted in a temporal moment. Such a perspective is rigorously the inverse of that of modern history.[39]

Although Annestay's approach to Rabi'a is different from the literary and historical perspective of the present study, he depicts 'Attar's authorial intent quite accurately. All of Rabi'a's hagiographers have sought to convey her "principial" meaning (or as Hendrik Vroom would say, her story's "religious truth claims") one way or another. Indeed, this meaning is a crucial part of her mythical identity. However, the principial meaning of her story in modern times is not always theological, nor is it always religious. For example, Widad El Sakkakini sees Rabi'a as a feminist icon: "Today I come, the last of the searchers, not to dispel this precious memory, not to clutch on a handful of sand, but to release long-hidden pages in the East and West. I stretch out with loving hand to gather them together, as they do the mementoes of a

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[39] Annestay, *Une Femme Soufie en Islam*, 27-28; Annestay is not an academic but a cartoonist, who has made a reputation for himself in France by designing stage sets and drawing the panels for graphic novels.

Heroine fallen in the struggle, so as to enshrine them in a worthy place."[40] Although Sakkakini's secular view of Rabi'a's principal meaning is very different from Annestay's, she too follows in the footsteps of previous hagiographers who portrayed Rabi'a as an icon. As with both Annestay and 'Attar, her portrayal of Rabi'a, although secular, is still teleological: "I was a star in the heavens, then I became an idea on earth."[41]

Like the modern authors Annestay and El Sakkakini, when 'Attar wrote about Rabi'a he attempted to paint her image with words. In Greek or Russian Orthodox icons, the principal meaning of the icon is expressed through the forms, postures, and gestures of the main figure. Because iconic figures are symbols rather than living people, their images serve as referents to narratives and theological texts that exist beyond the icon. In Medieval Latin Christianity, the iconic status of a saint was expressed through the trope of *admiranda*, "something to be wondered at." Aviad M. Kleinberg has observed that in the Latin West, "medieval female saints tended to belong more to the admirable than to the imitable pole of the spectrum."[42] One could say the same about most of the women saints of medieval Islamic hagiography. 'Attar's Rabi'a is also an example of *admiranda*. She is more an icon to be wondered at than a personal example to be followed. Although her story embodies many of the doctrines of Sufism, she is not portrayed as teaching a systematic spiritual method; instead, she stands for a set of spiritual ideals. For this reason, 'Attar's portrayal of her is more passive than Sulami's is. In 'Attar's accounts people come to pay their respects to Rabi'a, just as they would to an icon. Those who come to ask her advice do so in a formal and even ritualistic manner. When she goes on pilgrimage to Mecca, the Ka'ba seeks her out rather than the other way around. In one pilgrimage story, she is depicted in an ambiguous state between the beginning and end of her quest, neither back at her starting-point in Basra nor at her goal in Mecca. In nearly every one of 'Attar's stories, Rabi'a seems to be posed, as if she were a figure in a painting.

To better illustrate how 'Attar portrays Rabi'a as an icon, the full text of the introduction to her chapter in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* is reproduced below. 'Attar prepares the reader to view Rabi'a as an icon by placing her not only among the major figures of Sufism, but also among other female religious icons such as the Prophet Muhammad's wife 'A'isha and the Virgin Mary. In addition, he provides commentary to explain her unique and inimitable status. As part of his commentary, he stresses Rabi'a's difference from other women by saying that she was so far from being an ordinary woman that she should be regarded as an honorary man:

> This one is illuminated by a special spark, veiled with the veil of sincerity, consumed with love and longing, enamored of proximity and immolation, deputy of Mary the Pure, and accepted among men: Rabi'a 'Adawiyya (may God Most High have mercy upon her). If anyone asks why her memorial is placed among the ranks of men, we reply that the Most Honored of Prophets (may God bless and preserve him) says, "God does not examine your forms." In other words, [spirituality] is not about forms but about pure intentions. If the saying is correct that two-thirds of the religion is from [the Prophet's

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[40] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 9; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa* 10; here as in many other places, the English translation is more of a paraphrase than an exact rendition of the Arabic. For example, "the mementoes of a Heroine fallen in the struggle" are actually "the scattered bones of a [male] hero fallen in battle."

[41] El Sakkakini, *First Among* Sufis, 7; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 7

[42] Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 134-5

wife] 'A'isha the Righteous (may God be pleased with her), then it is also correct to benefit from her maidservant (*kanizkani-u fa'ida garaftan*). When a woman is on the path of God Most High, she is a man: she cannot be called a woman. Thus it is that 'Abbasa Tusi said, "When on the morrow on the Plain of Resurrection they call out, 'Oh men!' the first person to step into the ranks of men will be Mary."

If Hasan [al-Basri] would not hold a gathering unless [Rabi'a] was present, there is no harm in recording her memorial among the ranks of men. Indeed, when it comes to the reality of what this folk (i.e., the Sufis) are about, all are without distinction in divine unity. In unity, how can your existence or mine remain, much less "man" or "woman"? As Abu 'Ali Farmadi (may God have mercy on him) said, "Prophecy is the essence of glory and sublimity. High status and low status (*mihtari va kihtari*) are not part of it." Sainthood is the same. This is especially true for Rabi'a, who in her age had no equal in her behavior or knowledge of God (*ma'rifat*). She was considered one of the greats of her age and was a decisive proof for those who lived in her time.[43]

In the endnotes to his translation of 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a, Michael Sells remarks on the ambivalence of the portrayal of women in this and other passages in the text. However, he concludes that 'Attar does not try to "dewomanize" Rabi'a but "leaves the issue of women as women open." Sells sees 'Attar's view of women as more positive than that of St. Augustine or the medieval Christian writers who depicted women saints as viragoes: women in the guise of men. He finds justification for this position in the statement by the Prophet Muhammad that spiritual status is not about forms but about intentions and in 'Attar's assertion that in the station of divine unity gender distinctions are unimportant. For Sells, comments such as these indicate that Sufi women can be honored as women without being turned into honorary men.[44] On this point, he agrees with Margaret Smith, who states, "Such a conception of the relations between the saint and his Lord left no room for the distinction of sex. In the spiritual life there could be 'neither male nor female.'"[45]

Although it is possible to draw such a conclusion from this introduction, other statements in 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a seem to lead to a different conclusion. First, to claim, as Sells does, that "no theological statement is made about the status of women" by 'Attar is incorrect. 'Attar's assertion that gender distinctions are transcended in the station of divine unity is nothing if not theological. Another part of the problem is that Sells draws his conclusions from comparisons with Latin Christian writers on sainthood who were roughly contemporary with 'Attar. The

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[43] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 61, translation from the Persian text by Vincent Cornell. V. Cornell's translation differs in several ways from that of Paul Losensky in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 155. For example, Losensky does not correctly translate the pronoun reference that portrays Rabi'a as the maidservant of 'A'isha. Instead, he describes her as the maidservant of God. Losensky was apparently not aware that 'Attar confused Rabi'a with the earlier woman ascetic Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya (d. 702 CE), who was a maidservant of 'A'isha. Modern writers often go beyond such mistakes and take great liberties when translating this portion of 'Attar's text. For example, Margaret Smith adds a sentence that does not appear in 'Attar's original version: "As the Prophet said, 'The people are assembled (on the Day of Judgment) according to the purposes of their hearts.'" Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 19-20; (Rainbow Bridge), 2. As for Widiad El El Sakkakini, what she presents in her book as a "translation" of 'Attar's introduction is in fact completely made up. Apart from reproducing 'Attar's reference to 'A'isha, her version bears no resemblance to the original and even makes use of History of Religions scholar Rudolf Otto's concept of the "Idea of the Holy." El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis,* 42

[44] Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, n. 9, 345

[45] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 19; (Rainbow Bridge), 1

problem with this approach is that Meister Eckhart and the late medieval Beguines that he cites had no established historical or cultural ties to 'Attar's time and place. When religious and cultural contexts are as far apart as the distance between Western Europe and Nishapur, one cannot be sure that similar phenomena will have similar causes. Had Sells looked instead for comparisons in the writings of Christians from the Middle East, he might have seen things differently.

For example, in a recent article on the Gnostic Christian *Gospel of Mary* (third to fifth century CE), Karen King discusses theological arguments about the transcendence of gender that are very similar to those used by 'Attar in his chapter on Rabi'a. King notes that three different approaches to gender can be found in Gnostic Christian texts: (1) "The ideal (often the transcendent or noetic) is gendered as masculine; the lower (often the material or passionate nature) is gendered as female"; (2) the ideal is portrayed as male-female (androgynous), with the fallen condition divided into male and female; (3) "the ideal is nongendered; gender and sexuality belong to the lower sphere."[46] This last trope describes the approach to gender in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*. As 'Attar states: "When it comes to the reality of what [the Sufis] are about, all are without distinction in divine unity. In unity, how can your existence or mine remain, much less 'man' or 'woman'?" However, King was not able to correlate the trope of the nongendered ideal with any specific social practice in early Christianity. She concludes, "The mere fact of a woman in a position of leadership does not necessarily reflect a positive valuation of women."[47] This is an important corrective to Margaret Smith's assertion that "the high position attained by the women Sufis is attested . . . by the fact that the Sufis themselves gave to a woman the first place among the earliest Muhammadan mystics."[48] Although 'Attar and the author of the *Gospel of Mary* both maintain that men and women exercise leadership on the basis of spiritual maturity and not on the basis of gender, one must still ask, "To what end is this argument employed?"[49]

The question of ends or motives becomes even more important when we find that 'Attar not only uses the trope of the nongendered ideal, but he uses the highly gendered or misogynistic trope as well. In the previously quoted passage he states: "When a woman is on the path of God Most High, she is a man: she cannot be called a woman." This is clearly an example of King's first trope, in which the spiritual ideal is gendered as masculine and the opposite of spirituality is gendered as feminine. Otherwise, why can't a woman on the path of God be called a woman? To depict Rabi'a like this is a way of saying that in her spiritual knowledge she is a virago, which is a perspective that Sells claims not to find in 'Attar's narrative.[50]

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[46] Karen King, "Why All the Controversy? Mary in the *Gospel of Mary*," in F. Stanley Jones, ed., *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 59

[47] Ibid

[48] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 21; (Rainbow Bridge), 3

[49] King, "Why All the Controversy?" 60

[50] A similarly negative attitude toward femininity can be found in the writings of early Christian theologians too. For example, St. Jerome (d. 420 CE) stated, "She who serves Christ will cease to be a woman and will be called a man." Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, U.K. and Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1992), 4. With respect to misogyny, even Gnostic Christians were not very different from the orthodox. The Christian Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* states: "Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of Life.' Jesus said: 'I myself shall lead her, in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

The negative view of femininity that is implied by 'Attar's attempt to make Rabi'a into an honorary man is even more explicit in other passages, which contain references to woman's weak or corruptible nature. In one story, the ascetic Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 776 or 790 CE) is confounded when the Ka'ba leaves its location in Mecca and goes to meet Rabi'a in the desert. Despite this honor, Rabi'a is still described by 'Attar as a "weak woman" (Pers. *za'ifa*).[51] It is not clear from this example whether Rabi'a is physically weak or weak by nature. However, there is no such ambiguity in another story, in which the male ascetic Salih al-Murri (d. 792-3 CE) refers to himself as "an ignorant man" (*mardi jahil*) in contrast to Rabi'a, who is "a weak but knowledgeable woman" (*zani za'ifa dana*).[52] This implies that Rabi'a was able to reverse the normal hierarchy of gender distinctions through her knowledge. Salih al-Murri, who is by nature superior because he is a man, becomes a lesser person through his comparative lack of knowledge. However, one must not see this role reversal as essential or as implying that gendered hierarchies were not important to 'Attar. Rabi'a may have become a different type of woman through a unique series of circumstances, but her inborn nature remained the same: in her essence, she was still a "weak woman."[53]

Contradictory notions about gender are not the only contradictions that appear in 'Attar's chapter. Equally significant are the anachronisms. The most noteworthy of these can be found in the stories of Rabi'a's encounters with the early Sunni theologian al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728 CE). There are thirteen of these accounts in the text, including the reference to Hasan in the introduction, translated above.[54] This example also provides a clue as to why 'Attar placed Hasan and Rabi'a in the same generation. According to 'Attar, "If the saying is correct that 'two-thirds of the religion is from [the Prophet's wife] 'A'isha the Righteous (may God be pleased with her), then it is also correct to benefit from her maidservant." This statement indicates that 'Attar confused Rabi'a with the earlier woman ascetic Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya (d. 702 CE), who was in fact a maidservant of 'A'isha and transmitted Hadith from her. As we saw in Chapter 2, Mu'adha was the founder of the Basra school of women's asceticism of which Rabi'a was the most famous example. She also provided al-Hasan al-Basri with Hadith accounts that she transmitted from 'A'isha. Because of her reputation as a traditionist, it is reasonable to suppose that Hasan might have invited her to his teaching sessions. We also know from early sources that Mu'adha taught classes for women in Basra and that she had a number of well-known students.[55] Given this information, it is easy to see how the similar fame and reputation of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, who came from the same clan as Mu'adha in Basra, might have caused later writers to confuse these

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The Gospel of Thomas, Thomas O. Lambdin trans., in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, James M. Robinson, general editor (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 130

[51] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 64, Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 158

[52] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awilya'*, 69, Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 164; this statement appears as an addendum to an account that originally came from Sulami, in which Rabi'a paraphrases part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. See R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 80-1.

[53] In another account 'Attar describes how a man of high status is amazed at "the spiritual aspiration (*himmat*) of this weak woman (*za'ifa*)." The implication here is not only that Rabi'a is unusual, but also that she is acting against her nature. 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 71; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 166

[54] 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi also takes note of these anachronisms in his book on Rabi'a. For him, Rabi'a's association with Hasan's students led to the impression that she associated with Hasan himself. See idem, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 11 and 22.

[55] See for example, Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-kubra*, vol. 8, 483.

two figures. Once again, Roland Barthes' point about the verisimilitude of myth proves to be true. In myth, "paper time" nearly always prevails over chronological time.

The tropes that 'Attar used to develop the Rabi'a myth were taken not only from Sufi literature but also from Islamic scripture and even sometimes from Christian sources. Among the Islamic referents that he uses, stories of the prophets from the Qur'an are particularly important. In 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a one can find allusions to at least three prophetic or semi-prophetic figures whose visages are reflected in Rabi'a's iconic image. These are Moses, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. Moses is mentioned twice in the chapter. The first time he appears is in a divine address in which God speaks to Rabi'a through her heart "without an intermediary" (*Haqq Ta'ala bi vasita beh-dilash khitab kard*).[56] The setting of this account is in the desert (*badiya*) between Basra and Mecca, where Rabi'a has lost her way. She cries out: "My God! My heart is desolate. Where am I to go? I am but a clod of dirt (*kulukhi*) and that House (i.e., the Ka'ba) is but a stone (*sangi*). I need you!" Rebuking Rabi'a for her presumptuousness, God says: "Oh Rabi'a! You bathe in the blood of 18,000 worlds! Don't you see that when Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) desired a vision, we cast a small amount of divine manifestation (*tajalli*) at the mountain and it shattered into forty pieces?"[57]

The scriptural referent of this account is a famous story in the Qur'an, which describes God's encounter with Moses on Mt. Sinai. The key verse in the story is Qur'an 7:143, which portrays God as speaking directly to Moses, just as He did with Rabi'a. However, Moses, like Rabi'a in 'Attar's story, wants more. He desires to see God and says, "My Lord, show yourself to me, so that I may look upon you." God's answer to Rabi'a in 'Attar's story recalls the ending of this Qur'anic verse, in which God reveals himself to the mountain in front of Moses and it shatters into many pieces. This account in 'Attar's chapter consists of a double recollection. First, it recalls how God spoke to Rabi'a without an intermediary as He did to one of his prophets. This token of divine favor serves in the account as proof of Rabi'a's sainthood. Second, the account recalls not only the above passage of the Qur'an but also a hadith that explains the relationship between Muslim saints and the prophets who are their models: "The scholars (literally, 'the knowers') are the heirs of the prophets" (*al-'ulama' warathat al-anbiya'*).[58]

The second reference to Moses in 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a is part of a commentary that indirectly explains this hadith. The setting for the commentary is one of the accounts in which Rabi'a and al-Hasan al-Basri appear together. In this story, Hasan comes to visit Rabi'a just as darkness falls. Because of her extreme poverty, she has no lantern to light her hut. So she blows on her fingers, which burn like a lantern until daybreak (*Rabi'a tafa bar angushtan-i khud damid. Ta ruz angushtan-uyi chiragh miyafurukht.*).[59] After relating this story, 'Attar provides the following explanation:

> If someone should say, "What does this [story] mean?" We would say, "It is like the hand of Moses (peace and blessings be upon him)." If someone should say, "But he was a prophet." We would say, "Whoever follows a prophet shares in a portion of his miracles. If a prophet is associated with a prophetic miracle (*mu'jiza*), the saint is

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[56] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 63; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 157
[57] Ibid
[58] This famous tradition appears in the Hadith collections of Bukhari (Kitab al-'Ilm, 10); Abu Dawud (Bab al-'Ilm, 1); Ibn Majja (Muqaddima, 17); al-Darimi (Muqaddima, 32); Ibn Hanbal, 5:196.
[59] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 67; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 161; text translation by V. Cornell

associated with saintly miracles (*karamat*) through the blessings of following the example of a prophet (*beh-barakat-i mutabi'at-i payghambar*). As the Prophet [Muhammad] (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "He who rejects even a small portion of what is forbidden will attain a degree of prophecy." In other words, he who gives back to the Adversary (Satan) the smallest amount of the forbidden achieves a degree of prophecy. [The Prophet] also said: "The true dream is one-fourth of prophecy."[60]

The comparison in this passage of Rabi'a's miracle with the hand of Moses refers to Qur'an 20:22, which describes Moses' contest with Pharaoh's magicians. God instructs Moses to put his hand down at his side. When he draws it forth again, it is white or shining (*bayda'a*) and "without evil" (*min ghayri su'in*). In comparing Moses' white hand to Rabi'a's blazing fingers, 'Attar may have been thinking of white phosphorous, which burns spontaneously when it encounters air. However, the argument of this story is not scientific but theological. Not only are the miracles of the saints derived from the miracles of the prophets but the station of sainthood itself is also related to prophecy. As the friends or protégés (*awliya'*) of God, Muslim saints serve as deputies (sing. *na'ib*) of the prophets. 'Attar's references to Moses in this chapter illustrate the argument that as a major Sufi saint, Rabi'a plays a semi-prophetic role.

The analogy between Rabi'a and Moses similarly applies to Rabi'a and Jesus. In a story that comes just before the first reference to Moses discussed above, Rabi'a is on a pilgrimage to Mecca and the donkey that carries her belongings dies in the desert. When the other members of Rabi'a's caravan offer to take her things, she sends them away, preferring instead to put her trust in God. She then admonishes God, saying: "My God! Do kings treat an incapable woman in this way? You invited me to your House, but on the way you killed my donkey and left me alone in the desert!" At this, the donkey comes back to life and Rabi'a continues on her way.[61]

The scriptural referent in this story is the Qur'anic Jesus, who says in Qur'an 3:49: "I heal the blind and the leper and bring the dead back to life with God's permission." However, the story also has a gendered message. Rabi'a refers to herself as *'awrat 'ajiz*, "an incapable woman." This lack of capability is juxtaposed against Jesus' miracle of reviving the dead, which is one of the most powerful miracles attributed to any prophet in the Qur'an. In both Persian and Arabic the term *'awrat* refers to the sexual organs of men and women or to any part of the body that is shameful to view. Although its use as a synonym for "woman" in this story is metaphorical, it is far from the most respectful term that might be used. Once again 'Attar reveals his ambivalence about gender. Are we to read this story as an ironic repudiation of the tendency of men to hold women in low esteem, as Michael Sells seems to think? Or should we see it instead as another example of Rabi'a being the exception that proves the rule? Is this merely a way of dramatizing Rabi'a's miracle by accentuating how far she has left behind her essential nature as a woman?

Apart from Rabi'a, there are only two other female characters in 'Attar's chapter. These are the Prophet Muhammad's wife 'A'isha and "Mary the Pure" (*Maryam Safiya*). As we have seen, 'Attar describes Rabi'a as the maidservant of 'A'isha. This not only brings to mind the earlier figure of Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya, but also 'A'isha herself (see Chapter 2), who was a patron for the women ascetics of Basra. However, before 'Attar compares Rabi'a with 'A'isha,

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[60] Ibid

[61] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 63; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 157

he describes her as the "Deputy (*na'ib*) of Mary the Pure."[62] According to Stephen J. Shoemaker, Gnostic Christian texts from the Middle East often depict a "universal Mary" that takes on the attributes of both the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene.[63] This also appears to be the case with 'Attar's comparison of Rabi'a with Mary the Pure. His main referent for Mary the Pure is Mary the Mother of Jesus in the Qur'an (19:16-33), who is a model of chastity, divine election, and complete trust in God.[64] All of these characteristics can be found in Rabi'a as well. The key scriptural referent that links Rabi'a to Mary is the following Qur'anic verse: "Verily the angels said: 'Oh Mary! Behold, God has elected you and made you pure, and raised you above all the women of the world (Qur'an 3:42)." 'Attar's selection of Rabi'a as the only woman to merit a chapter in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* indicates that like Mary, she too has been raised "above all the women of the world."[65]

But the comparisons between Rabi'a and the Universal Mary do not end here. The ghost of Mary Magdalene is also present in 'Attar's portrayal of Rabi'a. This can be seen, for example, in the statement that a group of people contended (*gurohi guyand keh*) that Rabi'a "fell into playing music but later repented" (*dar mutribi aftad va baz tawba kard*).[66] The trope of Rabi'a as a fallen woman and repentant sinner like Mary Magdalene is a very minor part of 'Attar's narrative and the way that it is presented in the text indicates that he doubted its authenticity. However, as we shall see in Chapter 6, it was to become an important part of 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi's modern Existentialist revision of Rabi'a's *vita*. In some Christian Gnostic texts Mary Magdalene is called "The Pure Spiritual One," and Jesus is said to have marveled at her wisdom.[67] This is strikingly reminiscent of 'Attar's use of the term, "Mary the Pure." Even in some mainstream Christian texts Mary Magdalene appears as a symbol for divine love and the life of contemplation.[68]

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[62] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 61; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 155; Margaret Smith translates this phrase as "a second spotless Mary." Smith's depiction of Rabi'a as a Second Mary was to influence subsequent works on Rabi'a in European languages. See Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 21; (Rainbow Bridge), 4 and Annestay, *Une Femme Soufie*, 18.

[63] Stephen J. Shoemaker, "A Case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary," in Jones, ed., *Which Mary?* 8; an anonymous fourteenth-century Italian hagiographer evokes the trope of the Universal Mary when he states: "I do not trouble myself about chronology in my meditation; it delights me to tell of the Magdalene and what she did at this time according to my fancy . . . While I think of her I must perforce think of Jesus and His Mother." See Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 10.

[64] See also Annestay (*Une Femme Soufie*, 191), who describes Mary in the Qur'an as, "the archetype of the holy woman par excellence."

[65] For Annestay, "The miraculous power attributed to Rabi'a derives entirely from Mary." However, for him Rabi'a as the Second Mary reflects the Latin Christian archetype of *Mater Nutrix*, or "The Nurturing Mother." This is because like Mary, Rabi'a "turns herself into a channel of grace and blessings, and thus is a privileged intermediary between Earth and Heaven." Ibid, 192

[66] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 63; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 157

[67] Ann Graham Brock, "Setting the Record Straight— The Politics of Identification: Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother in *Pistis Sophia*," in Jones, ed., *Which Mary?* 51

[68] Gregory the Great's sixth-century *Homily on the Feast of St. Mary* refers to Mary Magdalene in a way that seems to foreshadow the later Muslim trope of Rabi'a the Repentant Sinner: "Mary Magdalene, a woman of the city which was a sinner, washed out the stain of her sins with her tears by her love of the truth, and the word of truth is fulfilled which says her sins are forgiven and she loved much. She who had previously been cold through sin was afterwards aflame with love." Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 12

Did 'Attar intentionally combine the images of Mary the Mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene when comparing Rabi'a to Mary the Pure? Although it appears that he may have done so, this cannot be proven conclusively. However, it is clear that tropes related to both the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene can be found in 'Attar's depiction of Rabi'a. According to Karen King, "The virgin-mother reinscribes the centrality of motherhood and women's subordination to men, while the depiction of Mary Magdalene . . . contests gender definitions, for example in promoting transcendence from sexuality and accompanying gender roles as the ideal."[69] In light of this observation, it is significant that 'Attar's Mary the Pure is a similarly ambiguous figure. It is also significant that the tropes of both Mary the Pure and The Repentant Sinner are used to highlight Rabi'a's transcendence of sexuality and socially imposed gender roles, just as King indicates was the case for Mary Magdalene.

For some medieval Muslim writers, the special status given to Mary the Mother of Jesus in the Qur'an meant that she was equivalent to a prophet. In an essay on the controversy surrounding the prophethood of women in Islam, Ibn Hazm of Cordoba (d. 1064 CE) noted that opinions on this subject were divided into two groups. The first group, which rejected the prophethood of women, cited two Qur'anic verses that seem to indicate that all prophets were men: "We did not send before you anyone but men whom we inspired" (Qur'an 12:109); "None but men were sent before you whom we inspired" (Qur'an 16:43). The opposing group, to which Ibn Hazm belonged, supported the prophethood of women and based its argument on the Arabic phrase *ma arsalna* ("we did not send") that appears in these Qur'anic verses. This group maintained that the verses referred only to divine messengers (*rasul*, from the same root as *arsalna*), but said nothing about women being prophets in general. Ibn Hazm added that since the Arabic word for prophet (*nabi*) comes from a root meaning, "to make known," anyone, even a woman, could attain prophetic or quasi-prophetic status if she makes God's teachings known to others.[70]

'Attar's statement, "When a woman is on the path of God Most High, she is a man: she cannot be called a woman," seems to put him among the group that rejected the prophethood of women. If a woman on the path of God cannot be called a woman, how can a prophet be a woman? However, at other times he seems to hold the opposite view. In one story, he even addresses the issue of women's prophecy directly. In this story, a group of men come to put Rabi'a to a test. They say to her: "All of the virtues have been distributed among men. The crown of maturity and good judgment (*muruvvat*) has been placed on the heads of men. The belt of generosity has been tied around their waists. And prophecy has never descended upon any woman. What makes you special?" Rabi'a replies: "Everything you say is true. But egoism (*mani*), self-love (*khud dusti*), self-worship (*khud parasti*), and [the conceit] 'I am your highest Lord!' (Qur'an: 79:24) have never come from a woman either. And no woman has ever been a transvestite (*mukhannath*)."[71] In this anecdote Rabi'a claims that the alleged weaknesses and deficiencies of women have preserved them from the sins of egoism and self-deification, which

[69] King, "Why All the Controversy?" in Ibid, 57

[70] Maribel Fierro, "Women as Prophets in Islam," in Manuela Marin and Randi Deguilhem, *Writing the Feminine: Women in Arab Sources* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 184

[71] "Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 71; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 166; *mukhannath* means transvestite and not "pederast," as in the Sells-Losensky translation.

are common among men. In the final statement about women not being transvestites she appears to mean, "Women are what we are. We are real. We do not pretend to be what we are not."

As in the previous story, 'Attar's opinion that gender distinctions are transcended in the station of divine unity seems to go against the notion that women have no share in prophecy. Could there not be a middle ground between rejecting the prophecy of women completely and stretching the Arabic language to advocate it as Ibn Hazm did? What if women saints were treated as honorary men? Even those who argued against the prophecy of women agreed that Mary the Mother of Jesus was a saint, as were Asiya the mother of Moses and Sarah the wife of Abraham.[72] As 'Attar says, "Whoever follows a prophet shares in a portion of his miracles." Would not an exceptional woman such as Rabi'a, who embodies the teachings of the prophets and thus shares in their mission, be similar in some ways to a prophet too? If this is the case, could not such a unique woman also enjoy a semi-prophetic status like Mary? This search for a middle ground between prophecy and sainthood seems to be what 'Attar had in mind when he compared Rabi'a to Mary the Pure. By assimilating Rabi'a the Icon to the image of the Universal Mary he could place her figuratively among the "men" of prophecy and divine inspiration. In this guise, she was able to take on both the semi-prophetic role of Mary the Mother of Jesus and the gender-transcendent role of Mary Magdalene.

III. EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY: 'ATTAR'S EMPLOTMENT OF RABI'A'S *VITA*

'Attar's literary iconography would not have been so effective if his chapter on Rabi'a in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* was only a collection of sayings and tropes, as were most of the accounts about Rabi'a written by his predecessors. None of the other Sufi writers mentioned in this study come to mind as easily as 'Attar does when Rabi'a's name is mentioned. In the large number of popular books and Internet notices that one finds on Rabi'a today, the Sufi author that is most frequently cited is 'Attar.[73] To quote the English rock singer Rod Stewart, if "every picture tells a story," then Rabi'a the Icon needed a story to make her myth come alive. Using 'Attar's chapter as an inspiration, Widad El Sakkakini justifies her feminist interpretation of Rabi'a's life-story by making the same point: "Because she has not written her own biography, nor left for the ages to come very much evidence to make her familiar to us, Rabia needs some of her hidden story to be brought to life."[74] Aleksei Losev might have added that Rabi'a the Icon needed more than just an image or a visage; it also needed a frame or back-story to make her image more powerful. This is why the *vita* that 'Attar composed for Rabi'a must be considered his most important contribution to her myth.

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[72] Fierro, "Women as Prophets," 185

[73] Popular works on Rabi'a in European languages often contain no historical references at all, not even to 'Attar. For example, in *La Vie de Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, Jamal Eddine Benghal only notes that such sources exist: "Nous raconterons la vie de Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya avec une petite romance sur une base de données historiques éparses dans plusieurs écrits" (37). Popular works in Arabic usually include a short bibliography of medieval and modern sources that are mixed together without distinguishing one group from another. See, for example, Ma'mun Gharib, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya fi mihrab al-hubb al-ilahi* (Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in the Prayer-Niche of Divine Love) (Cairo: Dar Gharib, 2000), 125-6. In such works, the main source of information is either 'Attar or modern works that rely on 'Attar's narrative.

[74] El El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 73; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 117-18

But should 'Attar's *vita* of Rabi'a be considered a work of religious tradition or religious fiction? In other words, did 'Attar make up the story of Rabi'a's life entirely or did he take its elements from previous sources? Given our present state of knowledge, the evidence suggests that he made the story up. Although a few of the anecdotes that 'Attar uses in his chapter on Rabi'a can be found in earlier sources, most of them cannot be found anywhere else and the details of Rabi'a's life that he outlines seem to originate with himself.[75]

However, it is clear that 'Attar wanted these accounts to be accepted as religious traditions because they are arranged one after the other in the "string of pearls" format common to the *tabaqat* genre of medieval Islamic literature (see Chapter 1). In this type of literature, the reader is not presented with a fully coherent and internally consistent narrative as in modern biography. Instead, one is faced with a collection of independent accounts, often in no chronological order, and for which the coherence must be provided by the reader herself. The reader is supposed to approach such works in the way that a jeweler examines a pearl necklace: one can approach each anecdote or narrative "pearl" individually or one can reflect on the entire narrative as a single unit, as when a jeweler looks at the whole necklace to determine its overall workmanship and value. Whether these accounts make historical truth claims or fictional truth claims (to use Hendrik Vroom's terminology), their arrangement in this way strongly indicates that 'Attar intended their truth to be found in their "principial" spiritual meaning and not in their empirical factualness.

'Attar's predecessor Sulami, who also organized his chapter on Rabi'a in this way, provides the reader with chains of transmitters for most of his accounts to prove their authenticity. This indicates that for Sulami, the factual accuracy of his narrative was important in order to support the authenticity of its message. This may have been because Sulami's Book of Sufi Women was written for Sufis, who viewed its characters as real Sufi exemplars. In a sense, Sulami's intended readers were like modern scholars who want to see footnotes in a text to prove the authenticity of its sources. In medieval Islamic works, chains of transmission serve much the same function as footnotes do today. 'Attar, however, who wrote his book for more general audiences, did not need to provide chains of transmission. Instead, he presents the accounts in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* as traditional knowledge without citing the names of transmitters. His accounts are to be treated as authentic simply because they are supposed to be old. Only a single name appears as a source for any of the accounts in his chapter on Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya: this is Abu 'Ali Farmadi, who is cited as the lone source for only one statement and one anecdote.[76]

Abu 'Ali al-Fadl ibn Muhammad al-Farmadi (d. 1084 CE) was a major Sufi of Khurasan. However, little biographical information is available on him. Trained in Shafi'i jurisprudence, he was favored by the Seljuk Turkish rulers of Iran, who gave him the title, "Chief of the Sufi Masters of Khurasan" (*shaykh shuyukh Khurasan*). Most sources claim that he was a teacher of the famous Sufi and theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali; however, according to some accounts, the

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[75] 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi calls 'Attar a "highly imaginative man" (*rajulun jamih al-khayal*) and makes the same points as those mentioned here. See idem, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 12. However, he adds the following comment to his assessment: "But we cannot reject everything that 'Attar says in this respect entirely. For the new documents (*watha'iq*) that are revealed to us day after day support many of the accounts that 'Attar transmits to us (Ibid)." I have no idea what "documents" Badawi is referring to and he does not cite them in his book.

[76] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 61 and 64; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 155 and 158

latter's younger brother Ahmad al-Ghazali (d. 1128 CE) was his actual disciple.[77] In his youth Farmadi studied under several well-known Sufis, including Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1073 CE).[78] Today he is best known as one of the links in the "Golden Chain" of spiritual masters of the Naqshbandi Sufi order.[79]

Naqshbandi sources mention that Farmadi specialized in Love mysticism.[80] From this we can surmise that he was probably aware of Abu Talib al-Makki's depiction of Rabi'a the Lover, as discussed in Chapter 3. The importance that Makki gives to Rabi'a in *Qut al-qulub* might account for Farmadi's interest in Rabi'a as noted by 'Attar. However, until the actual works of Farmadi are discovered and studied by scholars, there is no evidence that 'Attar relied on him for anything other than the two references noted above. Because Farmadi is the only person cited as a source for any of the accounts in 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a, it seems that 'Attar used his name and reputation to give his narrative the appearance of authority. This leads one to conclude that the best way to regard 'Attar's depiction of Rabi'a in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* is as a work of spiritual fiction.

The very fact that 'Attar set out to write a *vita* for Rabi'a further supports the conclusion that he set out to compose a story. As Hayden White has shown, biographers who draw their information from multiple sources often provide plots for their stories in order to tie up loose ends in the narrative and develop their characters more fully.[81] Hagiographers are no different; indeed, this tendency is even more pronounced in sacred biography. This process of emplotment can clearly be seen in the *vita* that 'Attar creates for Rabi'a. In the remainder of this chapter I will detail the most important plot elements of this *vita*, with accompanying comments on the roles these plot elements play in 'Attar's narrative:

1. Rabi'a is the fourth child in a family of four daughters. This is why she is called *Rabi'a* ("The Fourth").[82]

A common addition to this first major element of 'Attar's plot outline has been to give the name of Rabi'a's father as Isma'il; thus, the frequent rendering of her name as "Rabi'a bint Isma'il al-'Adawiyya." This was due to the early conflation of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya of Basra with Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Damascus.[83] The conflation of the two Rabi'as may have started as far back as the ninth-century *Kitab al-ruhban* (Book of Monks) of Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Burjulani (d. 852 CE). Ibn al-Jawzi, who corrects this mistake in *Sifat al-safwa*, nevertheless still

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[77] See, for example, J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1998 reprint of 1971 original), 32-33. According to Trimingham, Farmadi was Ahmad al-Ghazali's *shaykh al-suhba*, or master of personal spiritual training.

[78] J. A. Boyle, *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 297

[79] The Tahiri and Ghafuri Naqshbanid Golden Chains list Farmadi as a disciple of Abu al-Qasim Gurgani and claim that he was the shaykh of Abu Ya'qub Yusuf al-Hamadani (d. 1140 CE). The Naqshbandi Haqqani Golden Chain claims that he was a disciple of Abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Kharaqani (d. 1034 CE). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naqshbandi_Golden_Chain. For a summary of Naqshbandi-Haqqani traditions about Farmadi, see Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition* (Washington, D.C., Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2004), 129-131.

[80] The Haqqani Naqshbandi web site calls Farmadi "Knower of the Merciful and Custodian of Divine Love." This site also claims that he taught the Sufi technique of *tasawwur*, gazing at the face of one's shaykh in order to see the face of the Prophet Muhammad. http://naqshbandi.org/chain/8.htm

[81] White, *Tropics of Discourse,* 65-66, 73

[82] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 62; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 155

[83] See, for example, Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 15

calls Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's father Isma'il. In fact, he states that the fathers of both Rabi'as were named Isma'il.[84]

However, most authors after Ibn al-Jawzi who refer to Rabi'a's father as Isma'il do not cite Ibn al-Jawzi as their source. More often, they cite the Syrian historian Ahmad ibn Khallikan (d. 1282 CE), who refers to Rabi'a as "Rabi'a bint Isma'il al-'Adawiyya" in *Wafayat al-a'yan* (Death Notices of the Notables).[85] Ibn Khallikan also calls Rabi'a *Umm al-Khayr*, "Mother (or Source) of Goodness."[86] It is possible that this epithet recalls 'Attar's comparison of Rabi'a with the Universal Mary, discussed above. It is also possible that it reflects the Eastern Christian practice of describing female saints, like the Virgin Mary, as sources of goodness. For example, the Greek name *Agatha* is very close in meaning to *Umm al-Khayr*. Later on in Ibn Khallikan's text, in a section that recounts Rabi'a's teachings to Sufyan al-Thawri, he calls Rabi'a *Umm 'Amr* (Mother of 'Amr).[87] From information contained in Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa*, which Ibn Khallikan cites in his notice on Rabi'a, it appears that the name 'Amr actually refers to the son of the earlier female ascetic Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya,. The name of Mu'adha's son was 'Amr. Both 'Amr al-'Adawi and Mu'adha's husband Sila ibn Ushaym al-'Adawi were killed in battle in the late seventh century CE.[88] This detail makes it clear that Ibn Khallikan was but another of the many hagiographers who confused the story of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya with the story of Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the authoritativeness of Ibn Khallikan's work was so great that in the Arab Islamic world its verisimilitude overcame all doubts about its accuracy. Thus, the inaccurate reference to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as Umm 'Amr was taken by both medieval and modern writers as evidence that Rabi'a was married and had a child (see Chapter 3). Ibn Khallikan also adds to Rabi'a's *vita* by narrating an account in which she reproaches her father for eating food that was either obtained or slaughtered in an unlawful manner. When he asks, "Do you believe that I can obtain only what is forbidden?" She replies: "Being patient in the face of hunger in the world is better than being patient in the face of fire in the Hereafter."[89] If this anecdote refers historically to anyone, it most likely refers again to Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya, whose origin was non-Muslim. Although she was associated with the clan of Banu 'Adi ibn Qays like Rabi'a, she started out as a *mawlat* or client of the Prophet's Muhammad's wife 'A'isha. As a new Muslim convert, she would likely have doubted the lawfulness of the food her non-Muslim father provided. By attributing this story to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya Ibn Khallikan reinforces a claim made by both 'Attar and Sulami, in which Rabi'a is similarly of non-Muslim origin.

2. When Rabi'a is born, her family is so poor that they have nothing with which to wrap her, nor any oil for cleaning her. The night after her birth, her father has a dream of the Prophet Muhammad, who says that Rabi'a is a noble lady (*sayyida*) who will

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[84] R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, Ibn al-Jawzi *Sifat al-safwa* Appendix, 314-15

[85] Ahmad ibn Muhammad b. Abu Bakr ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-a'yan wa anba' abna' al-zaman*, Ihsan 'Abbas, ed. (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1978), vol. 2, 285

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid, 286

[88] For a full reproduction and translation of Ibn al-Jawzi's notice on Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya in *Sifat al-safwa* see the Ibn al-Jawzi Appendix in R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 264-9.

[89] Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-a'yan*, vol. 2, 285

intercede for 70,000 of his community. The Prophet also tells him to ask for 400 dinars from 'Isa Radan, the Emir of Basra. After hearing about this dream, the Emir gives 10,000 dirhams as alms to the poor and gives 400 dinars to Rabi'a's father, who takes the gold and spends it.[90]

This plot element shows that Rabi'a was predestined for greatness and also that she could practice a form of intercession (*shafa'a*) normally reserved for the Prophet Muhammad. Although minor details of this part of the story are sometimes changed in modern versions of Rabi'a's *vita*, for the most part later authors have preserved this portion of the outline just as 'Attar presents it. For example, the modern Egyptian writer Ma'mun Gharib specifies that Rabi'a was born in a hut (*kukh*).[91] This assertion takes as fact 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi's staging of the scene that opens his modernized version of Rabi'a's *vita*: "Come with me now, gentlemen, to a hut that is lowly but full of holiness, where there lives a worn-out old woman who has reached 80 years of age."[92] When writing this passage, Badawi was thinking of a reed hut similar to the huts of the Marsh Arabs, who live not far from Basra in the marshlands of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.[93] As we saw in Chapter 1, in Rabi'a's time these people were known as *nabat* and were looked down upon because of their poverty and non-Muslim background. For Badawi, this detail also supports the assertion that Rabi'a was originally not a Muslim, which he incorrectly attributes to Jahiz instead of to Sulami.[94]

Around the time that Rabi'a attains puberty (*chun Rabi'a buzurg shud*), a famine takes the lives of her parents and her sisters are separated from her. She falls into the hands of an evil oppressor (*zalimi*), who sells her for a few (silver) dirhams (*chand dirham*). Her new master works her very hard. One day she runs away from a stranger (*na-mahrami*) in the street, but falls and breaks her arm.[95] Helpless and desolate, she commits herself to God, who tells her, "Do not be sad. Tomorrow a grandeur will be yours such that you will be honored by my most intimate friends among the heavenly hosts (*muqarraban-i asman*)."[96]

There are four key terms in the Persian text of this part of 'Attar's story: "stranger" (*gharib*), "orphan" (*bi madar va pidar*), "captive" (*asir*), and "broken" (*shikasteh*). The purpose of this plot element is to set the stage for Rabi'a's spiritual transformation. In this portion of the narrative she is depicted as an orphan like the Prophet Muhammad and a captive like the Prophet Joseph: no one but God can help her. These details also make her comparable to the Virgin Mary, who like Joseph is a model in the Qur'an for *tawakkul*, complete trust in God. Rabi'a appears in this portion of the story as literally fallen and helpless, and has become a stranger in her own land. As the Qur'an asks rhetorically of the Prophet Muhammad: "Did [Allah] not find

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[90] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 61-2; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 155-6

[91] Gharib, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya fi mihrab al-hubb al-ilahi*, 25

[92] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 10

[93] According to the historical work *al-Basra al-fayha'* ((Basra the Fragrant), Sarkis the Chaldean claimed that the name Basra originally meant "Place of Reed Huts" (*mahall al-akwakh*). Ibid, *Tasmiyyat al-Basra* (Names of Basra), 2, http://www.a3ashk.com/vb/showthread.php?t=529

[94] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 13

[95] In Sells, *Earl Islamic Mysticism,* 156, Paul Losensky translates *na-mahrami* as meaning that Rabi'a fled from the indignity of being worked too hard by her master.

[96] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 62; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 156

you as an orphan and shelter you? Did He not find you lost and guide you? Did He not find you in need and make you self-sufficient?" (Qur'an 93:6-11).

The story of Rabi'a's captivity has become one of the most important parts of her *vita* for subsequent generations of hagiographers. Along with the claim that Rabi'a was a *mawlat*, or client of an Arab tribe, it provides the basis for the trope of Rabi'a the Slave. Margaret Smith states in *Rabi'a the Mystic* that the "evil-minded man" who seized Rabi'a "sold her as a slave for six *dirhams*."[97] Given the importance of this trope to the Rabi'a myth, it is signficant that neither the word "slave," nor the phrase "six dirhams," appears in 'Attar's Persian text. Instead, 'Attar describes Rabi'a as a captive (*asir*), perhaps to stress the injustice of a Muslim being forced into servitude by another Muslim.[98] Based on the original wording of the text, her condition is better understood not in terms of legal slavery but of criminality. Another way to interpret this plot element might be to see Rabi'a as subjected to indentured servitude, such as when poor girls are indentured to work as carpet weavers or family servants in some modern Muslim countries. This would allow her servitude to reflect the theological relationship in Islam between God and His subjects, which is depicted in the Qur'an more as a master-indentured servant relationship than as a master-slave relationship.[99] Seen in this way, this plot element provides an excellent illustration of Hendrik Vroom's point of how in religious stories, a fictional truth claim can reinforce the deeper truth of a theological truth claim.

3. While Rabi'a is a captive, she fasts continuously, works during the day, and spends her nights in prayer, remaining on her feet until daybreak. One night her master awakes and finds her praying. He sees a lantern suspended over her head without a chain and filling the room with light. Recognizing God's miracle in this, he frees Rabi'a from her service (*khidmat*) to him and allows her to leave, saying, "If you wish to stay here, we will serve you." Rabi'a then decides to leave.

The trope of the miracle of the lamp, which has figured prominently in nearly every version of Rabi'a's *vita* since 'Attar first introduced it, appears to have been taken from Sulami's Book of Sufi Women. In Sulami's work, a similar story is told of Hafsa bint Sirin, the sister of the famous early ascetic and dream interpreter, Muhammad ibn Sirin (d. 728-9 CE). Sulami relates: "Hafsa bint Sirin used to light her lamp at night, and then would rise and pray in her prayer area. At times, the lamp would go out, but it would continue to illuminate her house until daylight."[100]

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[97] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 23, (Rainbow Bridge), 6

[98] In Islamic Law, Muslims are not allowed to enslave other Muslims, nor are Muslims allowed to sell themselves or their children into slavery because of poverty. In cases where this has occurred, it was in violation of the Law or was justified as a legal fiction, such as when states enslaved rebels or political dissidents. In such cases, rebels were treated as heretics or apostates.

[99] See, for example, Qur'an 9:111: "Verily God has purchased from the believers their persons and possessions in return for Paradise. They fight in the cause of God and slay and are slain. It is a binding promise on God stated in truth in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an. And who is more faithful to his promise than [God]? So rejoice in the sale of yourself which you have concluded, for it is the supreme achievement."

[100] R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 122-3

In both versions, the religious meaning of the trope is the same: the light of the lamp symbolizes spiritual illumination or divine knowledge.[101] In his Book of Sufi Women, Sulami traces the account of Hafsa's lamp to Sa'id ibn 'Uthman al-Hannat (d. 906-7 CE), who was a disciple of the Egyptian Sufi Dhu al-Nun al-Misri (d. 859 CE).[102] This reference to Egypt raises the possibility that the story may be connected to the legend of the "Lamp of Umm Hashim" (*Qandil Umm Hashim*), a lamp that used to hang in the tomb of Sayyida Zaynab in Cairo. It was believed that the oil of this lamp miraculously replenished itself and that it would cure eye diseases.[103] In Shiite Islam, Zaynab the granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad is a major female saint. Her most likely resting place is a tomb in the town of Sayyida Zaynab some 12 kilometers south of Damascus. However, some early historians, such Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923 CE) claimed that she was buried in Cairo.[104] According to modern historians, the tomb attributed to Sayyida Zaynab in Cairo actually contains the remains of Zaynab the cousin of Sayyida Nafisa (d. 824 CE), the great-granddaughter of the Prophet's grandson Hasan. Whatever the historical truth of the matter may be, both accounts date to a time close to that of Dhu al-Nun al Misri, which suggests the possibility that the trope of the miracle of the lamp started out as an Egyptian legend.[105]

4. A group of people claim that Rabi'a fell into being a musician after she left the house of her master, but she repented later.

The trope of Rabi'a the Repentant Sinner will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Here I will only discuss one popular variant of this trope, the claim that Rabi'a played the reed flute (*nay*). The earliest version of this claim that I have been able to find comes from Margaret Smith's book *Rabi'a the Mystic*, which was first published in 1928: "According to one account, Rabi'a at first followed the calling of a flute player, which would be consistent with a state of slavery."[106] It is not clear what Smith had in mind when she said that flute playing was consistent with a state of slavery. Perhaps she was thinking of medieval accounts of female slaves who were trained as musicians for the Abbasid court in Baghdad. Another interpretation is provided by the contemporary Egyptian writer Taha 'Abd al-Baqi Surur, who sees this trope as alluding to the use of flutes by Sufis in sessions of spiritual audition (*sama'*).[107]

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[101] Margaret Smith interprets the light of the lamp as signifying the divine presence (Heb. *shekhina*; Ar. *sakina*) and compares it to the nimbus or halo that surrounds the heads of Christian saints in religious icons. Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 24 and (Rainbow Bridge), 7

[102] See the note on Hannat by Roger Déladrière in Ibn 'Arabi, *La vie merveilleuse de Dhu-l-Nun l'Egyptien*, 379-80

[103] The Lamp of Umm Hashim has been removed from the tomb of Sayyida Zaynab by the Egyptian authorities. In 1944 the Egyptian novelist Yahya Haqqi (1905-1990) published a novella under the title, *Qandil Umm Hashim*. For a recent translation of this work, see Yahya Hakki, *The Lamp of Umm Hashim and Other Stories*, Denys Johnson-Davies trans. (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006), 45-88.

[104] Michelle Zimney, "History in the Making: the Sayyida Zaynab Shrine in Damascus," ARAM 19 (2007), 695-703

[105] Caroline Williams, *Islamic Monuments in Cairo, A Practical Guide* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1993), 123-4 and 152-3; on Sayyida Zaynab see also, Nadia Abu-Zahra, *The Pure and Powerful: Studies in Contemporary Muslim Society* (Reading, U.K.: Garnet Publishing and Ithaca Press, 1997).

[106] Smith, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 24 and (Rainbow Bridge), 7

[107] Surur, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya wa al-hayat al-ruhiyya fi al-Islam*, 47

However, Surur also claims incorrectly that 'Attar was the original source of the flute story. Although 'Attar refers to Rabi'a as a musician (*mutribi*), there is no mention of her playing a flute in the Persian text of *Tadhkirat al-awiliya'*. The source of Surur's mistake was 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, who states in *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi* that 'Attar was the *only* hagiographer to claim that Rabi'a played the flute.[108] It is curious that as evidence for his assertion Badawi quotes 'Attar's Persian passage verbatim, which does not mention a flute at all.[109] Why would Badawi do this? This mistake is especially perplexing because the word for "reed flute" in Persian is *nay*, just as it is in Arabic; likewise, the Arabic word for "musician" is *mutrib*, just as it is in Persian. So what are we to make of Badawi's false assertion and his use of the trope of Rabi'a the Flute Player? Did Badawi borrow it from Smith, who made it up? Is this merely an example of creative license? As we shall see in Chapter 6, the most probable answer for Badawi was that it fit the image of the Aesthetic Woman that he was trying to paint for Rabi'a.

The closest medieval antecedent to the flute-player trope that I have been able to find is in *Rawdat al-ta'rif* (The Garden of Knowledge) by the Andalusian litterateur and vizier Lisan al-Din ibn al-Khatib (d. 1374 CE). However, even Ibn al-Khatib does not claim that Rabi'a played the flute; rather, he depicts her as saying that she once played the tambourine (*kuntu adribu al-daffa bi al-tabl*).[110] The claim that Rabi'a played the tambourine can also be found in a slightly later work, *al-Rawd al-fa'iq* (The Garden of Awareness), by the Egyptian Sufi Shu'ayb al-Hurayfish (d. 1398 CE). Most of what Hurayfish says about Rabi'a is based on 'Attar's chapter in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*. As we have seen, neither a flute nor a tambourine appears in 'Attar's Persian text. However, Hurayfish does provide a clue that may explain how 'Attar came up with the idea that Rabi'a was a musician. This can be found in an account that he attributes to Salih al-Murri (d. 792-3 CE), who is often mentioned as one of Rabi'a's ascetic companions. In this story, Murri talks about a slave-girl (*jariya*) who sang and played the hand-drum (*tughanni bi-l-tar*).[111] Although Murri does not say that the slave-girl is Rabi'a, Hurayfish assumes that she is. If the account cited by Hurayfish originally came from an early work of hagiography such as Ibn al-A'rabi's tenth-century *Tabaqat al-nussak* or Burjulani's ninth-century *Kitab al-ruhban*, it might account for the conflation of Murri's unidentified slave-girl and musician with the mythical figure of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as developed by 'Attar and his successors.

5. Rabi'a makes the Hajj pilgrimage but 'Attar does not specify how often this happens. The six accounts that discuss Rabi'a's pilgrimage in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* all revolve around the question of balance between the moral truth claims of the Law (*al-shari'a*) and the religious truth claims of faith (*al-haqiqa*).[112] The experience of faith is depicted as a form of intimacy with God that sometimes makes the letter of the Law superfluous. In one account, the Ka'ba is depicted as leaving its location in Mecca and coming to meet Rabi'a halfway on her journey. In two of the stories, Rabi'a seems to disparage the Ka'ba. In one of them she says: "My God, I am sore at heart. Where will I go? I am a clod of dirt and the Ka'ba is a stone. I need you." In

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[108] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 19

[109] Ibid, 19, n. 1; this quotation was taken by Badawi from the Persian text of Farid al-Din al-'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, R. A. Nicholson, ed. (London and Leiden: Luzac & Co. and E. J. Brill, vol. 1 1905).

[110] Ibn al-Khatib, *Rawdat al-ta'rif*, 148

[111] Hurayfish, *al-Rawd al-fa'iq*, 184

[112] Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 157-9; 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 63-5

the other story she says: "I need the Lord of the House. What am I to do with the Ka'ba? The Ka'ba is not worthy of me (*man-ra istita'at Ka'ba nist*).[113] What delight is there in the Ka'ba's beauty? What I need to welcome me is the One who said, 'Whoever approaches me by a span, I will approach him by a cubit.'[114] What would I see in the Ka'ba (*Ka'ba-ra cheh binam*)?" These stories affirm that the human heart is the true "House of God." In the final story of this series Rabi'a is depicted as being in an intermediate or ambiguous place, no longer "at home" in the worldly city of Basra, but unable to reach her true spiritual home with God in Mecca. She says, "At first, I did not bow to the House because I wanted you. Now I am not even worthy of your House." This story affirms how the moral truths of the Shari'a are inseparable from the spiritual insights of religion: even the lesser degree of awareness of those who are bound to the letter of the law is better than being cut off from God completely.

A full discussion of the pilgrimage stories in 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a would take a chapter by itself. The Egyptian philosopher 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi sees these stories as symbolizing three stages of awareness. In the first stage, Rabi'a goes to the Ka'ba like any other pilgrim. It is enough for her to fulfill the obligations of the Hajj according to the rules of the Shari'a. In the second stage, Rabi'a tries to integrate the Hajj pilgrimage into her ascetic practices. Badawi says, "She started to fulfill her pilgrimage on foot or crawling, or by practicing another form of bodily mortification that the Sufis make obligatory for themselves in order to multiply the rewards of the Hajj."[115] This sentence refers to 'Attar's description of Ibrahim ibn Adham's pilgrimage in the chapter on Rabi'a, in which this famous male ascetic performs two prostrations of prayer for every step that he takes. This type of asceticism corresponds to the model of instrumental asceticism outlined in Chapter 2. In instrumental asceticism the ascetic mortifies the flesh in order to gain a tangible reward in heaven. A similar type of asceticsm is ascribed to Rabi'a by the Syrian historian Ibn Khallikan. Ibn Khallikan describes her as wearing a hair shirt (*jubba min sha'ar*) under an outer wrap of wool (*khimar suf*).[116] However, the problem with instrumental asceticsim is that the satisfaction of fulfilling its requirements can lead to spiritual egoism. Widad El Sakkakini describes this paradox in her novel on Rabi'a as follows: "The greater the sacrifice, the greater the reward; therefore those who sacrificed the most were in fact the most greedy for rewards."[117] 'Attar seems to agree with this view, for the moral of this story is that after seeking the Ka'ba for fourteen years, Ibrahim ibn Adham was unable to see his goal when he reached it. Instead, the Ka'ba went to see Rabi'a. This is the greater truth of "seeing truly" through religious knowledge that Hendrik Vroom refers to in the article cited above.[118]

Badawi continues: "The ardor of [Rabi'a's] faith increased and her self-consciousness was raised by virtue of the austerities that she made obligatory for herself on the path of

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[113] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 63; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism,* 157; Losensky translates the Persian phrase *man-ra istata'at Ka'ba nist* as, "Its power means nothing to me."

[114] For this Hadith reference, see Bukhari, *Tawhid*, 50; and Muslim, *Dhikr*, 2, 3, 20-22.

[115] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 40-41

[116] Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-a'yan*, vol. 2, 287

[117] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 28; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 40

[118] Vroom, "Religious Truth," 126-7

pilgrimage. Thus it was natural that she would magnify the meaning of the Hajj in her mind. After the first stage, she sought the Ka'ba in order to see the Ka'ba. Now she begins to flirt with the idea of seeking the Ka'ba in order to see the Lord of the Ka'ba."[119] For Badawi, this leads to the third and final stage of Rabi'a's spiritual development, in which "the Ka'ba itself is deprived of all meaning and she comes to see no meaning at all in the Ka'ba." This, says Badawi, is the most dangerous of all spiritual stations because "it is the same idea that played a dangerous role in the sect of al-Hallaj and was one of the causes of his apostasy and crucifixion."[120]

The danger that Badawi refers to is expressed in the statement ascribed to Rabi'a by 'Attar in which she says, "The Ka'ba is not worthy of me." Over the centuries, the apparently antinomian nature of Rabi'a's pilgrimage stories in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* has led to accusations of heresy against Rabi'a by Salafi opponents of Sufism. One of the most recent of these Salafi opponents is Safar ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Hawali, a Wahhabi scholar from Saudi Arabia who was jailed for supporting Osama Bin Laden. Responding to a question about Rabi'a's Islam in one of his Internet lectures, Hawali draws on an obscure statement by the Hadith transmitter Abu Dawud to accuse her of heresy:

> We say about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya what the Imams of Hadith science such as Abu Dawud, who was a student of Imam Ahmad [ibn Hanbal], said in his Hadith collection and in the book *al-Jarh wa al-ta'dil* (Hadith Criticism and Assessment): "Rabi'a is the fourth of them in heresy (*Rabi'a rabi'atuhum fi al-zandaqa*)." That is to say, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was among the most misguided of the worshippers who went astray in their worship and deviated from the Sunna of their Prophet (may God bless and preserve him). She imagined that her entire purpose in life was Love, such that she abandoned the fear and hope of God in their entirety. She attached herself to the doctrine of Love and forbade what God the Most Blessed and Exalted mandated (*shara'a*) for women, such as marriage and the like. She practiced celibacy and monasticism like the Christians, not the [pre-marital] virginity that God the Most Blessed and Exalted mandated for His worshippers.[121]

In another Internet lecture Hawali adds that Rabi'a and her contemporaries "took as their religion what remained of Christian monasticism, which itself was derived from the monasticism of the Hindus, who became extremists by saying that God, may He be Glorified and Exalted, loved them as they loved Him."[122] Such accusations of Christian or Hindu influences are common in Salafi polemics against Sufism. Perhaps the best response to Hawali's polemic is to say, as Charles Upton does in his book *Doorkeeper of the Heart*, "Rabi'a was a devout Muslim, with no heterodox tendencies except those common to all mystics. There are always those who, failing to deeply enough grasp their own traditions, view their own esoteric lore as a pollution by foreign devils."[123]

Ironically, by accusing Rabi'a of heresy Hawali rejects the opinion of the Hanbali jurist and theologian Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE), one of the most important figures of

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[119] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 41

[120] Ibid, 42

[121] Safar ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Hawali, *Nubdha 'an Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (Selection on Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya) in the lecture *al-As'ila* (Questions), http://www.alhawali.com

[122] al-Hawali, *Min asbab al-zandaqa fi al-'ibad* (On the Causes of Heresy among the Worshippers), in the lecture, *al-Inhiraf fi al-'ibadat* (Deviations in Worship), Ibid.

[123] Upton, *Doorkeeper of the Heart*, xii

Salafism, who defended Rabi'a against accusations of heresy. In *Majmu'at al-rasa'il wa al-masa'il* (Collection of Letters and Opinions), Ibn Taymiyya denies reports that Rabi'a claimed that the Ka'ba was "an idol to be worshipped on Earth" (*al-sanam al-ma'bud fi al-ard*). In some medieval Arabic sources, this phrase, which does not appear in 'Attar's Persian text, is added to the end of the story in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* when Rabi'a asks, "What am I to do with the Ka'ba?" However, Ibn Taymiyya goes even further than refuting this statement in his defense of Rabi'a. Even if she did say such a thing, he says, he still would not agree that those who make such statements are unbelievers and must either repent or be killed. Reaffirming the theological truth claim of 'Attar's story, he states in the conclusion to his *fatwa* on Rabi'a: "Muslims do not worship the House; rather, they worship the Lord of the House by circumambulating it and by praying toward it."[124]

6. Rabi'a has several encounters with al-Hasan al-Basri. Most of these stories involve role reversals and portray Rabi'a as teaching Hasan a lesson that a major religious figure and ascetic such as him should already know. Sometimes the roles that are reversed are those of teacher and student; at other times his relationship with Rabi'a reverses the superiority of male over female. The most famous example of such a role reversal is the account that places Hasan and Rabi'a together by the banks of the Euphrates River. Hasan throws his prayer-carpet (*sajjada*) on the water and says, "Oh Rabi'a, come over here! Let us pray two prostrations together." Rabi'a replies, "Oh Teacher (*ay ustad*)! Are you going to peddle the goods of the non-worldly (*akhirtiyan*) in the market of the worldly (*dar bazar-i dunya*)? If so, you must do what the worldly types are not able to do." Then Rabi'a throws her prayer-carpet into the air and says, "Oh Hasan! Come here, so that you will be hidden from the eyes of created beings (*chashm-i khalq*)!" She explains: "Oh Teacher! What you have done a fish can do and what I have done a fly can do. The real affair is beyond both of these."[125] The meaning of this role reversal is revealed in the account that follows the story, in which Hasan testifies to Rabi'a's superior wisdom: "I was with Rabi'a for a full day and night. We discussed the matter of the Sufi way and its inner reality (*tariqat va haqiqat*) such that the thought, 'I am a man,' never occurred to me and the thought, 'I am a woman,' never occurred to her. When I arose at the end of this session, I saw myself as a person of no worth (*muflisi*) and I saw her as one of the righteous (*mukhlisi*)."[126]

'Attar's Hasan and Rabi'a stories are clearly anachronistic because Rabi'a was very young when al-Hasan al-Basri died in 728 CE. In addition, nearly every one of these stories starts with the phrase, "It is related that" (*naql ast keh*). This indicates that 'Attar himself presented them as legendary. However, he also wanted them to be taken as authentic traditions because they contained important truth claims about the Sufi way of knowledge. From the time that these stories first appeared in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, Rabi'a and Hasan have always existed in each other's shadow. The pairing of these two figures even extends to their burial place: as we

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[124] Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu'at al-rasa'il wa al-masa'il*, Muhammad 'Ali Baydawi, ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), vol. 1, 94; it is doubtful whether Widad El Sakkakini ever read Ibn Taymiyya's *fatwa* on Rabi'a for she incorrectly states, "But those who came after [Rabi'a], philosophers and interpreters alike, became confused by their own fanatical literalism. Among these was Ibn Taymia, who indulged in defamation of Rabi'a through his shallow outward understanding of her sayings." Idem, *First Among Sufis*, 48; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 74

[125] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 66; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 160-1

[126] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 66-7; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 161

shall see below, the most likely location of Rabi'a's grave is in the vicinity of al-Hasan al-Basri's tomb in the al-Zubayr suburb of Basra. However, in Sufi traditions, it is Hasan who lives in Rabi'a's shadow and not the other way around. As the story summarized above makes clear, Rabi'a's role in the Hasan and Rabi'a stories is to strip away the veil of superficiality and uncover the deeper truths of the Sufi path. In a way that recalls the discussion of Rabi'a the Lover in Chapter 3, she appears as a Diotima-like figure to Hasan's Socrates, providing insights that her famous male colleague would not otherwise have learned.

In his recent study of al-Hasan al-Basri in Islamic literature, Suleiman Mourad observes that the earliest accounts about Hasan depict "a very pious figure who uttered valuable sermons and anecdotes about piety, which emphasize proper worship and the deceitful nature of the world."[127] This is also how he appears in the chapter on Rabi'a in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*. However, his image is very different in 'Attar's chapter on al-Hasan al-Basri himself. Here 'Attar depicts him as a noted mystic and an important link between Sufism and the wider traditions of Sunni Islam. In fact, 'Attar was nearly as influential in creating the Sufi image of al-Hasan al-Basri as he was for Rabi'a. As Mourad points out, the same use of anachronism that characterizes 'Attar's depiction of the encounters between Hasan and Rabi'a can also be found in his chapter on Hasan. For example, in one passage Hasan is described as meeting the Prophet Muhammad, although the Prophet died ten years before Hasan was born.[128]

One of the most important early works to contain information about al-Hasan al-Basri is 'Abdallah ibn Mubarak's (d. 797 CE) *Kitab al-zuhd wa al-raqa'iq* (see Chapter 2). Mourad notes that in this work Ibn Mubarak depicts Hasan as "overwhelmed by sorrow and the fear of eternal punishment and is preoccupied with constant worship."[129] This depiction is also consistent with the image of Hasan in 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a. As befits the worldview of early Islamic asceticism, most of 'Attar's Hasan and Rabi'a stories involve the concept of the World/Non-World dichotomy. However, the most important of these accounts also discuss inner states of knowledge or spiritual attitudes that go beyond outward ascetic practices. For example, in one account Rabi'a reminds Hasan's disciples that true spiritual sincerity depends on the constant remembrance of God. In this story one of Hasan's disciples says to Rabi'a: "Hasan says that if he is deprived from seeing the Truth (*haqq*) for the moment of a single breath in Paradise, he will weep and moan so much that all of the people of Paradise will take pity on him." Rabi'a replies: "This is a fine statement. However, if in this world [Hasan] is also heedless of the remembrance of the Truth (*dhikr-i haqq*) for a single breath and the same anguish and weeping and sorrow come to him, only then will the same thing happen to him in the afterlife. Otherwise, it will not be so."[130]

As discussed in Chapter 2, ascetic practices in Rabi'a's time fell into three main categories. The first category, *instrumental asceticism*, was directed toward specific goals and was closely related to the practice of ascetic ritualism (*nusk*). Ascetics of this type tended to conceive of their relationship with God in terms of religious and moral obligations. The second

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[127] Suleiman Ali Mourad, *Early Islam Between Myth and History: Al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110H/728CE) and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship* (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2006), 63

[128] Ibid, 113-114; 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 26-41

[129] Mourad, *Early Islam Between Myth and History*, 65

[130] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 68; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 162

category of asceticism was *reactionary asceticism*. This type of asceticism was also instrumental but added a moral dimension that rated poverty above both wealth and ordinary life on the scale of values. The statements ascribed to al-Hasan al-Basri in the earliest sources agree in depicting him as a practitioner of both instrumental and reactionary asceticism. For the most part this is also true of 'Attar's depiction of Hasan in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*. The statement by Rabi'a quoted in the previous paragraph similarly reflects these two categories of asceticism. By assuming an equivalence of spiritual states and their effects in this world and next, Rabi'a demonstrates that she too is an instrumental ascetic. However, when she is portrayed in other stories as teaching Hasan the difference between ascetic practices and their inner reality, or when she says to Hasan, "What you have done a fish can do and what I have done a fly can do. The real affair is beyond both of these," her understanding of asceticism has moved to another level: it now corresponds to the category of *essential asceticism*. In many of the Rabi'a and Hasan stories in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* Rabi'a's rhetorical purpose is to convey the moral and religious truths of doctrines that Hasan can only approach from the outside. As such, she stands not only for essential asceticism but also for the transcendence of asceticism itself. For 'Attar this makes her a Sufi because her teachings demonstrate that excellence in ritual and ascetic practices depends on deeper states of spiritual and mystical knowledge.

The modern writer Widad El Sakkakini also makes the same point but in a more secular way in her book on Rabi'a. In the following passage, which is influenced both by psychology and Existentialism, she slso depicts Hasan as a reactionary ascetic. However, for El Sakkakini, all asceticism is reactionary: "Asceticism is seldom known to be inborn: the natural disposition of man is desire and greed. Therefore, behind every ascetic rages a tumult, however deeply concealed this may be. The lack or loss of fortune, fame, or a loved one; any of these may lead to a wish to forget and seek the comfort of serenity."[131] For El Sakkakini, "ascetic tyrants" like Hasan misunderstand the true meaning of Islam: "[T]hat Islam is a religion of effort in the present as well as the ultimate worlds; a counsel of work towards the development of man and his well-being."[132] In her view, because early Muslim ascetics were influenced by Christian, Indian, Platonic, and even Zoroastrian doctrines, they could not see that "asceticism was a heresy and an innovation paralyzing to the soul: it lured heads into the noose, and then pulled tight the rope."[133]

For El Sakkakini, the purpose of Rabi'a appearing anachronistically with Hasan in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* was to show that a more developed way of spirituality could replace primitive self-mortification. In her view, Rabi'a's rhetorical function was to remind Hasan and his followers that they had a distorted vision of the good, "which actually worked against all that they hoped to achieve— and against the fulfillment of those who followed in their footsteps . . . They had, in other words, put themselves into a position where they believed that they were the *source* of action (*wada'u anfusahum fi markaz al-haraka*), with the whole world reacting to them; they never understood that they themselves were the reacting elements."[134]

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[131] El Sakkakini, *First among Sufis*, 21; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 29; the Arabic text states literally, "[The ascetic] buries [i.e,. represses] this experience in the deepest part of his personality" (*wa qad yadfanu al-haditha fi 'amaqi nafsihi*).

[132] El Sakkakini, *First among Sufis*, 22; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 31

[133] El Sakkakini, *First among Sufis*, 22; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 32

[134] El Sakkakini, *First among Sufis*, 22 and 27; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 32 and 40

7. The excellence of Rabi'a's spiritual understanding is illustrated by 'Attar through her intimate discourses (*munajat*) with God. Six of these discourses or supplications appear in a separately titled section of 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a, including her most famous saying: "Oh Lord, if I worship you out of fear of Hell, burn me in Hell. If I worship in the hope of heaven, forbid it to me. But if I worship you for your own sake, do not deprive me of your enduring beauty (*jamal baqi*)."[135]

The literary tradition of ascribing intimate discourses with God to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya begins with 'Attar's Sufi predecessor Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1074 CE). Among the references to Rabi'a in Qushayri's *Risala* is the following account: "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya said in one of her *munajat*: 'Oh my God! Will You burn in Hellfire a heart that loves you?' Then a voice called out to her (*fa-hatafa bi-ha hatifun*): 'We would never do such a thing! So do not think ill of us!'"[136] In *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* 'Attar reproduces this anecdote in a different way. In his version Rabi'a states, "By God, if tomorrow you put me in Hell, I will cry out, 'You have made me a friend. Is this how you treat your friends?' A voice calls out, 'Rabi'a do not think ill of us![137] Be assured that we will bring you into the circle of our friends, so that you may converse with us."[138]

Although 'Attar provides no *isnad* or chain of transmission for this account, one can speculate that he may have gotten it from Qushayri via the latter's student Abu 'Ali al-Farmadi. The differences in the details of the two versions are minor enough to have been due to problems of oral transmission. We will probably never know where Qushayri got the original version because he does not cite any sources either. Whatever its origin, this *munaja* is one of the most widely quoted statements of Rabi'a in Sufi literature and must be considered the most important contribution of Qushayri to the Rabi'a narrative. The *munajat* in 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a convey insights into how the Sufi is to behave before God, a spiritual attitude that al-Harith al-Muhasibi called "being attentive to the rights of God" (*al-ri'aya li-huquq Allah*).[139] These spiritual attitudes are also related to Rabi'a's Love mysticism as portrayed by Abu Talib al-Makki in *Qut al-qulub*. Thus, they can be seen as indications of Muhasibi's and Makki's influence on 'Attar's Sufism. In devotional terms, Rabi'a's *munajat* in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* express the selflessness and single-mindedness of the sincere worshipper of God. However, although the object of Rabi'a's love is divine, these dialogues express emotional states that are familiar to lovers everywhere. As such, they illustrate Hendrik Vroom's contention that the truth of religious stories is grounded in their evocation of basic human experiences.[140] With respect to religious truth claims, they also convey in a popular register the "Love that is truly worthy of God," which is the moral of Rabi'a's Poem of the Two Loves in Makki's *Qut al-qulub* (see Chapter 3).

8. The final section of 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a describes her death and testifies to her exalted status with God through dreams and visions in which she appears after death.

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[135] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 74; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 169

[136] Qushayri, *al-Risala*, 328; this saying is also reproduced and ascribed to Qushayri's *Risala* by Ibn Khallikan in *Wafayat al-a'yan* (vol. 2, 285).

[137] This last sentence is in Arabic in 'Attar's text, just as it is in Qushayri's original.

[138] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 74; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 169

[139] This concept provided the title for Muhasibi's most famous work, *al-Ri'aya li-huquq Allah*, discussed in Chapter 2.

[140] Vroom, "Religious Truth," 122

At the moment when she dies a voice is heard reciting the Qur'anic verse: "Oh soul at peace! Return to your Lord well-pleased and well-pleasing. Enter among My worshippers and enter into My heaven!" (Qur'an 89:27-29)[141] Through scenes such as these, 'Attar leaves the reader with the image of Rabi'a as a humble worshipper, who is never arrogant with her Lord, who wants nothing and never asks of God, "Make me thus," or "Do this or that." After her death she appears in a dream in which she is asked about Munkir and Nakir, the two angels of death in Islam. She replies, "When those pure youths (*javanmardan*) came to me, they asked, 'Who is your Lord? I said: 'Go back and tell the Divine Reality (*Haqq*): Out of so many thousands of people You have not forgotten an old woman (*pir zani*)? Out of all of the worlds I have only You. Never would I forget You such that you would have to send someone to me to ask, "My God, who are You?"'"[142]

Most of the dream visions of Rabi'a that can be found in medieval Islamic literature are attributed to 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal, who is identified by Ibn al-Jawzi as Rabi'a's maid-servant in the latter part of her life. The earliest writer to cite a dream-account of Rabi'a after her death is Ibn al-Jawzi, who places these narratives at the end of his chapter on Rabi'a in *Sifat al-safwa*. 'Attar would do the same less than a generation later in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*.[143] Because Ibn al-Jawzi does not cite any chains of transmission for these accounts, we have no way of knowing where he got them or if 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal even existed.[144] 'Attar does not mention 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal; instead, he mentions two other individuals to whom Rabi'a speaks from the grave. These are Muhammad ibn Aslam Tusi and Ni'ma (*sic.*) Tarsusi,[145] At present it is impossible to say whether the accounts of visions of Rabi'a after her death originated with Ibn al-Jawzi himself or whether both he and 'Attar got them from another, unknown source. However, because they do not comprise common tropes of Sufi hagiography until after the time of Ibn al-Jawzi and 'Attar, it is likely that these legends originated no earlier than the twelfth century CE.

IV. POSTSCRIPT: WHERE IS RABI'A BURIED?

Some of the most important discrepancies in the accounts about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's death concern the location of her burial place. As mentioned above, her most likely resting place is in the vicinity of al-Hasan al-Basri's tomb in the al-Zubayr suburb of Basra. However, Ibn Khallikan states in *Wafayat al-a'yan*: "Her grave is visited regularly. It is outside of Jerusalem to the east on top of the hill known as Tor."[146] In this passage, Ibn Khallikan refers to the tomb known today as "The Station of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya" (*Maqam Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*) on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. This tomb, which is located inside of a cave, contains

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[141] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 74; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 169; the last part of this Qur'anic passage is not reproduced in the Sells-Losensky translation.

[142] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 75; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 170

[143] R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, Ibn al-Jawzi Appendix, 280-281

[144] In *Wafayat al-a'yan*, Ibn Khallikan also quotes this passage and states that Ibn al-Jawzi includes a chain of transmission going back to 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal. However, no such chain of transmission can be found in modern editions of *Sifat al-safwa*. See Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-a'yan*, vol. 2, 287.

[145] 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 75; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 170

[146] Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-a'yan*, vol. 2, 287

architectural features that date it to the Crusader or Mamluk periods of Jerusalem's history. In other words, the architecture of the tomb is more or less contemporary with Ibn Khallikan himself, who flourished in the thirteenth century. For this reason, it is possible to speculate that his assertion that Rabi'a is buried there may have been due to a local legend that associated Rabi'a with this site. Today the tomb is cared for by a Palestinian Arab family of Moroccan origin. According to local legends, the tomb has been associated with a Christian, a Muslim, or a Jewish woman saint throughout its history. It is likely that the actual occupant of the tomb is the late fourth-century CE Christian saint Pelagia of Antioch, who early sources agree was buried on the Mount of Olives. According to the Syriac *Life of Pelagia*, this female ascetic and penitent lived in a cell on the Mount of Olives.[147] Such cells were often located in caves. It is not unlikely that the tomb was venerated as Pelagia's in Crusader times but after the Muslim reconquest of Jerusalem it was "reassigned," so to speak, to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.

Apart from Ibn Khallikan's *Wafayat al-a'yan*, the most important premodern text to provide an alternate location for Rabi'a's tomb is *al-Kawakib al-durriyya fi tarajim al-sadat al-Sufiyya* (The Pearly Spheres in the Biographies of the Sufi Saints), by the Egyptian Sufi Muhammad 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Munawi (d. 1621 CE). Most notably, this work claims that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya lived in Egypt.[148] In terms of the historiography of the Rabi'a narrative, Munawi's work is important because most subsequent Egyptian versions of the Rabi'a myth are based on it. For example, we saw in Chapter 3 how the modern Egyptian writer Su'ad 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq used Munawi's narrative as evidence that Rabi'a was married. In addition, a tomb ascribed to Rabi'a can be found in Cairo. For many Egyptians, this tomb provides material proof of Munawi's contention that she lived in Egypt. Munawi's work is also important because it provides an illustration of how the trope of Rabi'a the Sufi was understood in the centuries after 'Attar. For example, he uses Makki's and 'Attar's trope of Rabi'a the Lover to critique the spirituality of the great Sufi shaykh of Baghdad, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166 CE). According to Munawi, both Rabi'a and 'Abd al-Qadir focused their spiritiual devotion too intensely on the Absolute and thus transgressed the limits imposed by the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad.[149]

From the point of view of critical scholarship and the rules of historical research, Munawi's chapter on Rabi'a is most notable for the number of rules that it breaks. Throughout the text, accounts from previous works are mixed together without attribution and even without concern for logical consistency. For example, although Munawi claims that Rabi'a lived in Egypt, he also relates how the ruler of Basra in Iraq offered her a large sum of money if she would marry him.[150] Even worse, in his notice on Rabi'a bint Isma'il, which follows the chapter on Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, we find that Rabi'a bint Isma'il was from Basra and was an 'Adawiyya in clan origin, even though the "Egyptian" Rabi'a was the person named Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. As if this were not enough, Munawi follows Ibn Khallikan in calling Rabi'a *Umm al-Khayr* and

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[147] For the story of Pelagia of Antioch, see the translation of the Syriac *Life of Pelagia* in Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 40-62; see also, Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 77-84, who notes that early versions of *The Life of Pelagia* also existed in Latin and Arabic.

[148] Munawi, *al-Kawakib al-durriyya*, vol. 1, 285. Munawi calls Rabi'a "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya *then* the Egyptian (*thuma al-Misriyya*)." For a partial English translation of Munawi's notice on Rabi'a, see John Renard, ed., *Windows on the House of Islam: Muslim Sources on Spirituality and Religious Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998), 132-5.

[149] Munawi, *al-Kawakib al-durriyya*, vol. 1, 290

[150] Ibid, 286

further adds that she was a *mawlat* who belonged to the clan of Al 'Aqil instead of the clan of Al 'Atik, as claimed by Sulami and others. However, he makes these claims not about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya but about Rabi'a bint Isma'il, an assertion that cannot be found in any of the earlier sources.[151]

It is clear from the confusion of his narrative that Munawi was not sure whether the two Rabi'a's were the same or different people. For example, he includes the Poem of the Intimate Gift, which as we saw in Chapter 3, most likely belonged to Rabi'a bint Isma'il, in the chapter on Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya.[152] However, he correctly states that Rabi'a bint Isma'il was married to Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari. Munawi also believed that Rabi'a bint Isma'il was the person buried in the tomb ascribed to Rabi'a on the Mount of Olives (*Ra's Zayta*) in Jerusalem.[153] Compared with 'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, Munawi's work is spiritually and theologically shallow and it is difficult for the modern researcher to credit him with making significant moral and theological truth claims and insights that outweigh his mistakes. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, his work remains important for the historiography of the Rabi'a myth. Because his conflations of the narratives of the two Rabi'as conform closely to what is found in popular legends and literature, Munawi's *al-Kawakib al-durriyya* can be added to 'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* and Ibn Khallikan's *Wafayat al-a'yan* as a key premodern text that helped shape the monument of Rabi'a the Icon as we know her today.[154]

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[151] Ibid, 291

[152] Ibid, 288

[153] Ibid, 293

[154] In calling Rabi'a the Icon a "monument," I follow Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Disccourse on Language*, A. M. Sheridan-Smith trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 138-139. For Foucault, a *monument* is a discourse that stands iconically by itself or on its own terms, as opposed to a *document*, which is a discourse that stands for something else.

CHAPTER 6

RABI'A THE ICON (II): THE SECULAR IMAGE

The greatest legends are those which most resemble the truth.
    — Widad El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis: The Life and Thought of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, 7; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa,* 7

Religions— and secular worldviews as well— live through stories (at present often films) that show how people have insight and live properly, know how to deal with difficulties, or else bungle things, make the wrong choices, and fail. Paradigmatic stories sketch a view of life and give direction.

    — Hendrik M. Vroom, "Religious Truth," 117-118

       The previous chapter demonstrated how the medieval Persian Sufi and hagiographer Farid al-Din al-'Attar constructed a *vita* for Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and thus became the most important agent of the Rabi'a myth. The verisimilitude of 'Attar's "paper-time" revisions of the Rabi'a narrative was so effective that these revisions are now regarded as facts. Using an analytical model created by the Dutch philosopher and theologian Hendrik M. Vroom, I also discussed how religious stories such as those presented by 'Attar make truth claims that operate on several levels at once. The historical claims that such stories make are not the only important ones; sometimes, they are the least important. Moral and theological truth claims are often the real point of such stories. Sometimes, fictional stories express moral and theological truth claims better than facts, especially when the form in which they are presented conveys a sense of verisimilitude. This is what Roland Barthes refers to when he discusses the "reality effect." It is also the point that Widad El Sakkakini makes when she states in the epigraph above, "The greatest legends are those which most resemble the truth."

       A major argument of Chapter 5 was that something very close to this idea was at work in 'Attar's presentation of Rabi'a, al-Hasan al-Basri, and other important Sufi figures in the hagiographic anthology, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*. However, at times historical truth— or at least an approximation of it— is important to religious stories too. When the figures in Sufi stories are meant to be real exemplars, as in the *tabaqat* works of Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, their historical factualness is important for the lessons contained in these stories. This is why Sulami relied on chains of transmission (Ar. *isnad*, pl. *asanid*) to back up his accounts, much as contemporary scholars rely on footnotes. Both footnotes and chains of transmission serve a similar purpose: they act as witnesses or guarantors for the information they convey.[1]

       Now that the Rabi'a narratives have entered the modern era, the sense of factuality has become even more important than before. Although there are still traditionalist Sufis, such as the French writer Jean Annestay, who like 'Attar, are most concerned with the "principial" meaning of the Rabi'a narratives, the majority of the audience for these narratives are imbued with modern notions of empirical history and consider it important that the literary portrayals of Rabi'a are

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[1]Similarly, in the fields of conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, factual discourse analysis, and the sociology of scientific knowledge, this type of category entitlement is called "footing," even when it occurs orally or in non-Western cultural contexts. See Potter, *Representing Reality*, 142-145.

historically real. Most modern Muslims speak of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as a historical figure and consider 'Attar's accounts to be not only figuratively true but factually true as well. Even if they doubt the miracle stories that 'Attar and others have added to the Rabi'a narrative, they believe that her life-story and teachings are mostly accurate.

However, the modern importance of factuality is not only an issue for the religiously minded audience of the Rabi'a narratives. Because historicism and the empirical notion of historical truth have become part of modern culture, since the twentieth century, academic and historical narratives have mostly replaced Sufi narratives as the main vehicles of the Rabi'a myth. As a result, the audience for the Rabi'a narratives has broadened. Rabi'a is now the object of *secular* attention as well as religious attention and secular notions of objectivity have become inextricably bound up with religious notions of principial truth claims. Secular authorities must now be considered along with medieval Sufi authorities such as Makki, Sulami, and 'Attar as agents of the Rabi'a myth. When studying these secular agents of myth, one must approach them on their own terms and assess their works according to the methods they employ. On this new ground, a retreat into the primacy of moral and theological truth claims over historical truth claims cannot save these writers from Roland Barthes' critique that even supposedly "objective" historians can become purveyors of the "falsely obvious."

In the first part of the twentieth century, Margaret Smith replaced 'Attar as the chief agent of the Rabi'a myth, not only in the English speaking world but throughout the wider world as well. This was due to the reputation of her highly influential academic and historical study, *Rabi'a the Mystic* (1928). In Chapter 5, we saw how this well-respected English scholar added what Barthes calls "nostalgic reminiscences" to the Rabi'a narrative, such as when she describes Rabi'a as playing the flute. Smith's fictional image of the flute-playing Rabi'a has since become a major trope of the Rabi'a narrative.

Smith's importance to the construction of the Rabi'a myth illustrates another significant modern development that must not be overlooked: not only are secularists and modern historians contributing to the Rabi'a myth but also *non-Muslims* are her agents of myth as well. To return to Vroom's categories, we cannot speak of Islamic theological truth claims in regard to Margaret Smith because she was a Christian. The religious and theological observations that she makes in *Rabi'a the Mystic* are not Islamic but comparative; furthermore, they are based on a Christian worldview, such as when she compares Sufi ascetics to Franciscans. Although Smith has arguably been Rabi'a's most important agent of myth in the modern period, we cannot treat her in the same way that we treat 'Attar. Strictly speaking, as an outsider to the Muslim and Sufi worldviews, Smith cannot make moral and theological truth claims about Rabi'a: she can only make observations. Scholarly observations do not go as far epistemologically as truth claims. The only academically legitimate claims that Smith can make are historical; hence, those who study her work must also approach her claims historically, according to historical standards of evidence. Apart from this, we can examine her use of tropes and other techniques of literary discourse in her construction of the Rabi'a myth. This is why it is intellectually appropriate to employ modern and secular approaches to the construction of the Rabi'a myth in this part of the present study, such as the post-structuralist approach of Barthes and the phenomenological approach of Losev.

In this chapter, we shall see how two decades after Margaret Smith another important agent of the Rabi'a myth emerged in the Arab world. This time her agent was neither a Sufi like

'Attar nor an Orientalist scholar attracted to mysticism like Smith. Instead, this new agent of myth, 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi (1917-2002), was a radical Egyptian secularist, an Existentialist philosopher, and the most respected Arab scholar of Islamic philosophy in his time. Much as with Smith, the verisimilitude of Badawi's representation of Rabi'a's *vita* depended on his scholarly reputation. Badawi's reputation as an academic authority on Islam was so great that his imaginative and at times overtly fictional additions to the Rabi'a narrative went unquestioned and were quickly accepted as factual by most of his readers. The verisimilitude of Badawi's narrative inspired the Lebanese feminist writer Widad El Sakkakini and the Egyptian screenwriter Saniya Qura'a to popularize and add to his reconstruction of Rabi'a's life-story. Through the influence of Qura'a's screenplay in particular, the image that Badawi constructed of Rabi'a has spread across the Muslim world from Morocco to Indonesia. Ironically, this secular image has now been accepted by Sufis as well, such that few today are able to distinguish Badawi's additions to the Rabi'a narratives from what originally came from 'Attar.

I. RABI'A THE EXISTENTIALIST

Badawi's reconstruction of the Rabi'a myth is the centerpiece of his book, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya the Martyr of Divine Love). Badawi first published this book in 1948 and revised it in 1960. The most recent edition was published in Kuwait in 1978.[2] Today, this work is something of an unwanted child among Badawi's publications. Despite its importance to the development of the Rabi'a myth, it is often missing from lists of his scholarly publications. In this work, Badawi applies to hagiography some of the key philosophical themes that he would later develop in his 1960 treatise on Existentialism, *Dirasat fi al-falsafa al-wujudiyya* (Studies in Existentialist Philosophy).[3] In *Martyr of Divine Love*, Badawi portrays the ascetics and mystics of early Islam as anxious or "unquiet" souls (to borrow a term from the scholar of medieval sainthood Richard Kieckhefer).[4] In particular, he treats Rabi'a's spiritual life as a quest to resolve the anxieties and inner conflicts that arise from her life experiences.

Badawi's use of the Existentialist concept of anxiety or angst (Ar. *qalaq*) as the motivation for Rabi'a's spiritual transformation in *Martyr of Divine Love* also appears in another of his works, *Shakhsiyyat qaliqa fi al-Islam* (Anxious Personalities in Islam, 1946).[5] Most of this little-known work, which appears to have been a forerunner of *Martyr of Divine Love*, consists of notes and translations from the writings of Badawi's teachers, the Orientalist scholars Louis Massignon and Henri Corbin. In it, he examines four types of Islamic religiosity: (1) "Iranian

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[2] 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (Kuwait: Wakalat al-Matbu'at, 1978 reprint of the 1960 revised edition); this work has been cited many times in the preceding chapters.

[3] 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, *Dirasat fi al-falaafa al-wujudiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafa, 1978 reprint of 1960 first edition)

[4] See Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984); Kieckhefer takes the title of his book from Saint Augustine's concept of *inquietum*, the restlessness of the soul that searches for God (181). As we shall see below, this concept is similar to Søren Kierkegaard's concept of restlessness, which provides the basis for Badawi's theory of existential anxiety.

[5] 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, *Shakhsiyyat qaliqa fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Nahda al-'Arabiyya, 1964 reprint of the 1946 first edition)

Islam" is symbolized by the Persian companion of the Prophet, Salman al-Farisi (d. 656 CE); (2) "Sufi Islam" is symbolized by the Sufi martyr Abu Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922 CE); and (3) "Illuminationist Islam" is depicted through the writings of another martyred mystic, Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (d. 1191 CE). The fourth type of religiosity, Islam's approach to other faiths (Badawi doesn't provide a name for this), is depicted through an account of the Prophet Muhammad's conflict with the Christians of Najran in Arabia (ca. 631 CE).

In the Preface to *Studies in Existentialist Philosophy*, Badawi gives the following definition of Existentialism, which reproduces the model that he used for his depiction of Rabi'a in *Martyr of Divine Love*:

> Existentialism is a very precisely defined approach (*madhhab*) to being (*wujud*): it is founded on a very basic and simple principle, which is that a person's being consists of his actions (*wujud al-insan huwwa ma yaf'aluhu*). The actions of the person are what define and form his being; for this reason the person is measured by his actions. Thus, the being of every person is [defined] according to his actions. This approach is the opposite of Essentialism (*al-mahiyya*). This [latter concept] is the approach of those who posit a prior essence for the human being out of which his actions grow, in accordance with which he is judged and by which he is defined.[6]

Elsewhere in *Studies* Badawi states, "In Existentialism, every point of view (*nazariyya*) develops from one's life experiences."[7] This explains why in *Martyr of Divine Love* he felt the need to ground every aspect of Rabi'a's spirituality— from her asceticism, to her Love mysticism, to her wisdom as a teacher— in specific life experiences, even if he had to make them up himself. Badawi's attempt to ground Rabi'a's worldview in life experiences also helps explain the verisimilitude of his portrayal of her: the more an author portrays a character in a way that is similar to ourselves, the more we are likely to believe it.

According to Badawi, the concept of Existentialism was first expressed by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), who stated: "Verily, I have found truth; truth, but in regard to myself. For I have found the idea (*al-fikra*) to be that for the sake of which I wish to live and die."[8] Badawi explains that the idea to which Kierkegaard refers is life itself, according to the full realization of its possibilities. Because life can only be realized through action, the full potential of the human being must be attained through struggle (*nidal*): "[struggle] between the self (*al-dhat*) and the Absolute, between God and the world, between reality and appearance, between the present moment and the totality of one's life, between time and eternity, and between knowledge and faith. This struggle will imprint on [human] existence its most fundamental characteristics: [freedom of] choice (*al-ikhtiyar*), change (*al-taghayyur*), individuality (*al-infirad*), and autonomous selfhood (*al-dhatiyya*)."[9]

Badawi bases his representation of Rabi'a's life-story in *Martyr of Divine Love* on his understanding of Kierkegaard. In *Studies in Existentialist Philosophy*, he explains that for Kierkegaard,

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[6] Badawi, *Dirasat fi al-falsafa al-wujudiyya*, Preface before p. 1;

[7] Ibid, 42

[8] Ibid, 2; this is a translation of Badawi's Arabic translation of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is one of the most discussed philosophers, and any interpretation of his views is potentially open to criticism. The following discussion represents Badawi's views of Kierkegaard and Existentialism, not my own.

[9] Ibid

[T]he self is constantly preoccupied with itself; this [preoccupation is expressed through] the feeling of freedom, which is accompanied by sin (*khati'a*). This constitutes present existence, "face-to-face before God." The human being is free and unique, without the possibility of duplication. He cannot be placed in a general category and cannot be defined by an abstract concept. Existence is struggle (*tanaqud*); it is the point of encounter between the finite (*al-mutanahi*) and the infinite (*al-lamutantahi*) and between the temporal (*al-zamani*) and the eternal (*al-sarmadi*). It is found in its finite individuality (*fi fardiyatihi al-mutanahiyya*), immersed in time. It returns to itself and revolves around itself, certain in itself of its concreteness (*'ayniyatiha*) and its individuality. However, Being, insofar as it can be described as present in infinitude and eternality, also returns to God or the Absolute. In this rupture between an individuality comprised of itself and a present shared in conjunction with God, Being confirms itself as living, but in a condition of danger, impulsiveness, or sin.[10]

According to Badawi's understanding of Existentialism, the meaning of existence is found in the experiences that motivate the self. The self comes face to face with reality through an active or passionate (*infi'ali*) engagement with life. Badawi observes that some of the greatest and most passionate struggles are associated with religious faith, where the human desire for freedom and autonomy is confronted by the limits that are imposed by God and the world. The person is thus forced to find a balance between her desires and limitations; this creates a state of tension because not all desires can be fulfilled. Out of these tensions arise the existential states of despair (*ya's*) and anxiety (*qalaq*). These states arise from the feeling of isolation that occurs when the struggle of the self to live autonomously leads to error, sin, and the frustration of the self's hopes and desires.[11]

Following Kierkegaard, Badawi identifies three personality types according to Existentialist philosophy: Aesthetic Man (*rajul jamal*), Ethical Man (*rajul akhlaq*), and Religious Man (*rajul din*).[12] These three types correspond to three different ways of life: the Aesthetic Path (*al-madraj al-jamali*), the Ethical Path (*al-madraj al-akhlaqi*), and the Religious Path (*al-madraj al-dini*).[13] The Aesthetic Path is lived in the present; the Ethical Path is lived in time; and the Religious Path is lived in eternity. Badawi describes Aesthetic Man as something like an Epicurean. He lives through the body for the sake of sensual gratification; his motto is *carpe diem* (seize the day), and he avoids personal attachments because he fears that they will constrain his freedom. However, unlike the true Epicurean he is constantly restless and is unable to find inner peace. He rejects marriage and companionship because he values his independence but also because he is unable to tolerate stability for very long. Aesthetic Man is ambitious and sees life as a battle. For him, other people are purely instrumental: they are valuable only to the extent that they help him attain his goals.[14] The ultimate emptiness of this existence makes Aesthetic Man subject to the moods of frustration and despair.

By contrast, Ethical Man seeks a meaningful life through the fulfillment of duties and responsibilities: he values this fulfillment not by means of material wealth but through reputation

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[10] Ibid, 2-3

[11] Ibid, 3-4

[12] Ibid, 42

[13] Ibid

[14] Ibid, 43

(*dhikra*) and repetition (*tikrar*). Because Ethical Man finds satisfaction in the fulfillment of duties and responsibilities, he lives his life as a social being and often is devoted to the improvement of his society, country, or humanity in general. He values companionship and marriage because he finds pleasure in sociability and because of the benefits that living with a partner brings to the development of the self. In moral terms, Ethical Man is not Epicurean but Aristotelian. He lives according to the just mean and judges the value of everything according to the principles of fairness and balance: "The Ethical type advocates the establishment of the mean and discriminates between good and evil according to it; he judges everything according to the principle of the mean and balance."[15] By seeking fulfillment in society, Ethical Man hopes to attain justice, security, and personal stability; however, the price of his fulfillment is the loss of his autonomy and individuality.

Unlike Ethical Man, who constructs the story of his life in time (*bi-l-zamaniyya*) by building his reputation or career, Religious Man seeks to transcend both time and the world and desires to live in eternality (*bi-l-sarmadiyya*). Because he views existence from a divine perspective, Religious Man is detached from both time and the world. Badawi describes the condition of Religious Man in the following way: "[Religious Man] desires the discourse that is spoken in Heaven and touches the hand of the Spirit of those spirits that are born in the supernal. If [Religious Man] is a woman, her speech calls out to God for her to attain divine grace (*rida'*) and reach the level of the Soul at Peace (*martabat al-nafs al-mutma'inna*). All of [her] efforts are toward attaining the eternal and everlasting life that [her] mind imagines to be lived within the divine embrace. In general, these states are the states and stations that are well-known among the Sufis."[16]

In *Martyr of Divine Love*, Badawi depicts Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as embodying each of these personality types in turn. Following the outline of her *vita* as composed by 'Attar, he divides her life into three distinct phases, each corresponding to a particular type. The periods of her youth, captivity, and liberation set the stage for his depiction of Rabi'a as Aesthetic Woman. In order for her to conform to this type, Badawi constructs an entirely new narrative about her early life that stresses her physical beauty, restlessness, and desire for independence. Because the aesthetic personality is both artistic and sensual, he adds to her *vita* the trope of the reformed sinner by combining 'Attar's image of Rabi'a the Musician with Christian tropes of saints who had dramatic conversion experiences, such as Paul of Tarsus, Augustine of Hippo, and Teresa of Avila. In the background of this picture is another early Christian trope, the "fallen woman" saint. This trope was to be developed further in the 1950s by Widad El Sakkakini, who compared Rabi'a in her youth to the courtesan saint Thaïs of Alexandria.

For the next stage of her life, Badawi depicts Rabi'a as Ethical Woman by focusing on her repentance, asceticism, and conversion to Sufism. For Badawi, the Ethical personality type was exemplified in early Islam by the theologian al-Hasan al-Basri and his students, who associated with Rabi'a in the community of ascetics in and around Basra. To create a background for Rabi'a's change from Aesthetic Woman to Ethical Woman, he depicts eighth-century Basra as a city with a split personality. It contained within itself the contradictory attributes of rural

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[15] Ibid, 44
[16] Ibid, 45

simplicity versus high urban culture, a world-denying asceticism versus world-affirming hedonism, and the moralistic life of renunciation versus the artistic life of the senses.

For the final phase of Rabi'a's life, Badawi uses the ideal type of Religious Woman to illustrate the resolution of her inner conflicts. According to Badawi, Kierkegaard saw poetry and Love mysticism as typical expressions of women's spirituality. Badawi depicts Rabi'a's interest in poetry and Love mysticism as evidence of her attempt to find fulfillment in transcendence of the world. For Badawi, the female version of Religious Man is more passive than the male version. In his view, Religious Woman can find her true self only by surrendering herself to another. Expressing a feminine spirituality based on submission, Religious Woman gives herself up to a higher self that has achieved transcendence. This transcendent self is personified as a divine male spouse, who is free of all worldly limitations.

Badawi's description of early Abbasid Basra provides the setting for these transformations of Rabi'a's personality. In his essay, "The Reality Effect," Roland Barthes stresses the importance of realistic description in creating an aura of what he calls "aesthetic verisimilitude." The verisimilitude of realism is achieved through a carefully constructed but seemingly natural description of objects and events.[17] To illustrate this phenomenon, Barthes uses Gustave Flaubert's realistic depiction of the city of Rouen in the novel, *Madame Bovary*. Barthes remarks that in Flaubert's description of Rouen, "all that mattered were the figures of rhetoric to which the sight of the city lends itself— as if Rouen were notable only for its substitutions."[18] The care and detail taken by Flaubert in constructing a description of Rouen was crucial to the realism that made *Madame Bovary* a classic of French literature. In the following passage from this novel, Charles Bovary has been sent to school in Rouen as a teenager. His mother finds him a room on the fourth floor of a building that overlooks a small river called Eau de Robec. Flaubert uses the literary technique of realism to describe what Bovary sees when he leans out of his window:

> The river, which makes this part of Rouen a kind of miserable little Venice, flowed beneath, yellow, violet or blue, between its bridges and its railings. Workmen, kneeling on the bank, were washing their arms in the water. On poles, jutting out from the attics, skeins of cotton were drying off in the air. Facing him, over the roofs, there was the pure wide-open sky, red from the setting sun. It must be grand over there! So cool under the beeches! And he opened his nostrils to breathe down the sweet smells of the country, smells that never reached this far.[19]

Likewise, in the opening paragraph of *Martyr of Divine Love*, Badawi also uses the literary technique of realism to depict eighth-century Basra in a way that recalls Flaubert's description of Rouen:

> The Arab Venice: shimmering like a resplendent jewel to the eyes of hungry and fatigued travelers coming from the depths of the desert in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula. As they reach their destination and their camels kneel at al-Mirbad, they enter the Great Mosque at the Desert Gate (*Bab al-Badiya*), dazzled by the fine cylindrical columns and

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[17] For a social scientific discussion of the "aesthetic verisimilitude" of realism, see Potter, *Representing Reality*, 162-165

[18] Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in idem, *The Rustle of Language*, 144

[19] Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, Geoffrey Wall, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 9-10

intricate craftsmanship that Ziyad ibn Abihi bestowed on this magnificent architectural monument of early Islam. Their eyes, covered with desert sand, wander about in this luxuriant godliness. They feel a touch of what awaits them on the eastern side of the city, in the northern and southern regions, where great ships come from Baghdad to the north via the Ma'qil Canal and vessels from the Persian Gulf to the south plow the waters of the al-Ubulla Canal in a dignified way, entrusted with the most valuable cargoes from India and China.[20]

Although Badawi's resplendent "Arab Venice" of Basra is far from the "miserable little Venice" of Flaubert's Rouen, it is clear that he is trying to create a similar aura of aesthetic verisimilitude. I cannot say whether Badawi was inspired by *Madame Bovary* when writing *Martyr of Divine Love*. However, this is not impossible because much of his education was in France. In any case, he uses realistic description in the same way as Flaubert does to convey a sense of reality. For Badawi, Basra in the time of Rabi'a was a meeting-place of extremes: it was a newly created city, in which the simple life of the Arab desert confronted the sophistication of Persian urban culture. In this city as well, an austere religiosity competed with indulgence and excess. Making a pun out of the title of Abu Talib al-Makki's Sufi work *Qut al-qulub*, Badawi states that one part of Basra yearned for the worldly satisfaction of the senses (*qut al-hawwas*), while the other part yearned for the otherworldly satisfaction of the heart (*qut al-qulub*).[21]

For Badawi, Basra's split personality was mirrored in the lives and personalities of its inhabitants, including Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Within her, there raged a struggle between opposing extremes, with the worldly and otherworldly fighting to dominate each other. Badawi admits that the idea of a struggle in Rabi'a's soul can only be a matter of conjecture because the historical details of her life are lacking. Much as I observed about the Rabi'a narratives in the Introduction to the present work, he states: "The deeper I looked and the more documents and manuscripts I consulted, the more I saw [Rabi'a's] personality disappear into a cave of myths. The more I scrutinized reports about her the more they faded into oblivion, such that I became disappointed and lost all hope of finding any information about her life or any of her statements that would allow me or any other serious historian to confirm them with ease. Everything that was attributed to her was like water running through the fingers of the researcher who tries to establish a systematic and scientific method of inquiry."[22] Badawi concludes that because so much vital information is lacking, Rabi'a's "real" story cannot be the subject of history; rather, it can only be the subject of myth (*ustura*). Because the worldviews of myth and scientific history cannot be reconciled, the modern scholar must rely on philosophy to "open up a light onto the unknown" and reveal the existential selves (*dhawat wujudiyya*) of Rabi'a and her contemporaries. In such a way, says Badawi, the method of the philosopher can guide the steps of the historian.[23]

By using Existentialist philosophy to aid historical investigation, Badawi's methodology becomes comparable to that of the Russian phenomenologist Aleksei Fyodorovich Losev, although they never knew of each other's works. In *The Dialectics of Myth* Losev states: "Myth is not the substantial, but an *energistic* self-affirmation of a person. It is the assertion of a person

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[20] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 7
[21] Ibid, 8
[22] Ibid, 11
[23] Ibid, 8

not in her deepest and ultimate root, but in her *manifestational* and *expressive* functions."[24]
Badawi would agree with the first part of this statement: the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya indeed
expresses the affirmation of her identity. However, he would probably disagree with the second
part of Losev's statement and argue instead that in the case of the Rabi'a myth, her self-
affirmation through myth *reveals* her identity rather than *constructs* her identity in the way that
Losev believed. The Existentialist Rabi'a that Badawi portrays in *Martyr of Divine Love* is a
paragon of self-affirmation. For Losev, the problem with such a portrayal is that a character
based on a philosophical ideal type is not a real person but is merely another type of story or
myth. Instead of shining light on Rabi'a's real self, depicting her in terms of Existentialist
philosophy merely adds another "face" to the various images in which Rabi'a the Icon has
appeared throughout history. In other words, for Losev, Badawi's Existentialist version of
Rabi'a's story accomplishes nothing more than to add another "visage" to her icon.

   Badawi's most important contribution to the Rabi'a narrative as literature was to depict
her in the first part of her life as the female embodiment of Kierkegaard's Aesthetic Man. In
Martyr of Divine Love, he depicts Rabi'a the Aesthetic Woman as traveling "on the road to
Damascus" (he uses this expression several times), according to the trope first established for
Paul of Tarsus in *Acts of the Apostles*.[25] The key motif of this trope is a life-changing experience.
Rabi'a's first life-changing experience occurs as a child, when she falls down in the street while
fleeing an evil man and implores God to protect her.[26] This reliance upon God in a state of fear
causes her to look inward rather than outward for her salvation. For Badawi, Rabi'a's attempts
after this to seek communion with God in solitude correspond both to the reality of her condition
as a captive and to the Aesthetic personality type, which seeks to find the self in solitude rather
than in companionship with others.

   The second turn in Rabi'a's life occurs when her master frees her from captivity. Fleeing
from her master's home out into the street, she now seeks fulfillment in the world and abandons
her former pious pursuits.[27] At this point in her life, says Badawi, Rabi'a "followed the path of
her life in any way that she wished."[28] In this part of the story, he brings up 'Attar's statement
that Rabi'a "fell into playing music" and adds Margaret Smith's trope of Rabi'a playing the
flute.[29] This act of creative license sets the stage for Badawi's most dramatic portrayal of Rabi'a.
According to Badawi, the newly liberated Rabi'a tries to find herself by embracing the world of
the senses and earning her living as a performer. It is fitting, he says, that she should turn to such
pursuits, for it is through art that women best express their individuality.

   According to Badawi's interpretation of Existentialism, the lessons of life are learned
through the body. Therefore, he speculates that not only did Rabi'a experience her freedom
through worldly pursuits but she also indulged in them wantonly. "We can only imagine," he
writes, "that she devoted a long period of her life to the path of intentional sin (*tariq al-ithm*),
drowned herself in the sea of lusts, and gorged herself on the pleasures of the senses (*iqtatat bi-*

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[24] Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, 93

[25] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 18; see also, *Acts of the Apostles*, Book 9.

[26] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 16

[27] Ibid, 19

[28] Ibid

[29] Ibid. See also, 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 63; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 157.

qut al-hawwas) until she was satiated."[30] For Badawi, this must have been the case because
Rabi'a later repented of her sins, "and this repentance by itself is clear proof for us of her
compulsion to reach the ultimate limit in the path of lust."[31] After all, he opines, there is no need
to repent without sin. In this respect, Rabi'a's journey through life was similar to that of St. Paul,
"whose excessive [Christian] faith was the result of his excessive hatred for Christianity, or St.
Augustine's excessive life of subterfuge [as a Manichaean], which led him naturally to excess in
the sensuous life that he lived before his conversion to the [Christian] faith."[32]

       Badawi's treatment of Rabi'a's life-story in *Martyr of Divine Love* provided the
inspiration for Widad El Sakkakini's depiction of Rabi'a in *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa* (The Sufi
Lover), a quasi-novelistic biography that was first published in 1955.[33] As noted previously, El
Sakkakini's portrayal of Rabi'a is both Existentialist and feminist. In her representation of
Rabi'a's life as in Badawi's, as soon as Rabi'a attains her freedom, she rejects the self-denial and
poverty that her captivity had imposed on her and turns instead to the life of the senses. "After
her escape from slavery and servitude into the gay life of liberated women (*hayat al-ghayad al-
mutaharirat*), Rabi'a discovered a new kind of existence, engulfed in nights of perfume and
tenderness; she turned toward pleasure and away from the austerity and chastity to which she had
become accustomed."[34]

       However, El Sakkakini's approach differs from Badawi's in that she portrays Rabi'a's
hedonism as a reaction to traumatic experiences. Unlike other writers, she depicts Rabi'a as
abused both physically and sexually by men. In El Sakkakini's revision of 'Attar's narrative, the
first time Rabi'a is abused is when a slave trader captures her: "She was followed and chased by a
vicious thief, from whom she ran screaming and calling for help. She fell to the ground; he
grabbed her like a despised object; and soon after she was sold to a wealthy merchant for six
pieces of silver." [35] Another time Rabi'a is abused is when her master sends her to the market:
"On the way back she was confronted by a vicious man, a human animal; and running from him,
frightened and shocked, through the winding streets of Basra, she escaped— though with injury.
She had fallen and broken her arm."[36] However, the worst form of abuse that Rabi'a suffers is
from her master the wealthy merchant, who keeps her in a state of both physical and sexual
servitude. El Sakkakini is the only writer to suggest that Rabi'a was raped while in captivity:
"Was she able to rid herself of the memory of her first captor, who had used her as he willed? No

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[30] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 20

[31] Ibid

[32] Ibid, 21

[33] The most recent edition of this work is Widad al-El Sakkakini, *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa, Rabi'a al-
'Adawiyya* (Damascus: Dar Tlas li-l-dirasat wa-l-tarjama wa-l-nashr, 1989 reprint of the 1955 Cairo first
edition). This work was translated into English by Nabil Safwat as Widad El El Sakkakini, *First Among
Sufis: The Life and Thought of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, with an Introduction by Doris Lessing.

[34] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 16; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 22

[35] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 13; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 17; in El Sakkakini's Arabic text
Rabi'a is sold by the thief for a "low price" (*thaman bakhs*). The trope of six pieces of silver used by the
translator Nabil Safwat in *First Among Sufis* comes from Margaret Smith's *Rabi'a the Mystic*, where
Rabi'a is sold for six dirhams. Smith's trope is obviously based on the New Testament, where Judas
betrays Jesus for pieces of silver. See idem, *Rabi'a* (Oneworld), 23 and (Rainbow Bridge), 6.

[36] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 13; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 17

one but the victim can really tell of the effects of being violated and robbed of her chastity. This
alone may have changed her approach to life completely."[37]

For the most part, El Sakkakini's portrayal of Rabi'a follows Badawi's depiction quite
closely. However, in line with the theme of sexuality, she bases her account of Rabi'a's religious
conversion not on St. Paul, St. Augustine, or St. Theresa of Avila as Badawi does, but on St.
Thaïs of Alexandria, a fourth-century courtesan whose story became popular in Europe through
an 1890 novel by Anatole France.[38] Recalling the novel *Thaïs*, El Sakkakini states in her book:
"As I write this, I am imagining the ancient story of Paphnutius the priest, who wandered out
from Thebes in central Egypt. He traversed the desert barefoot until he reached Alexandria,
where he prostrated himself before the naked Thaïs. Thaïs, whose gathering was intoxicated with
wine and the fragrance of incense, and whose palace was notorious for licentiousness and
dissipation— did she not change and become a saint as she approached her death?"[39]

This passage refers to the scene in the novel *Thaïs* where Paphnutius, the Abbot of
Antinoë, first encounters Thaïs reclining with other courtesans in the Grotto of the Nymphs.[40]
It seems that for El Sakkakini, the figure of Paphnutius stood for Ibrahim ibn Adham, the Sufi
ascetic of 'Attar's narrative, who struggled for years to cross the desert to Mecca, only to find that
the Ka'ba had already gone by itself to meet Rabi'a.[41] A central theme of the novel *Thaïs* is that
Paphnutius could never free himself from his desires, despite his extreme austerities. Instead, he
compensates for his desires by becoming the agent of Thaïs's conversion. However, because
Thaïs had already been baptized as a Christian, she was predestined for salvation despite her
reputation for sin. Just as in 'Attar's story of Ibrahim ibn Adham in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, in
Anatole France's novel ascetic austerities do not automatically lead to salvation. One can only
earn salvation through God's grace. At the end of the novel, Thaïs becomes more beautiful as she
approaches death while Paphnutius becomes uglier because his passion for the world remains
unresolved.[42]

As she imagines Rabi'a after her liberation from captivity, El Sakkakini reflects on the
paradox of "the wandering singing-girls and the maiden lovers described by Pierre Louÿs in *Thaïs*
and *The Songs of Bilitis*. Despite their disrespect for piety, and immersed as they were in
debauchery, they were nonetheless inclined to piety. The Cypriot singer Mnasidika hoped that
despite spending many years in licentiousness and sin, the following words would be written on
her tomb: 'Here lies the most pious of women.'"[43] In this passage, El Sakkakini assumes
incorrectly that the Belgian-French Orientalist writer Pierre Louÿs (1870-1925) was the author of
the novel *Thaïs*. In actuality, Louÿs was the author of *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (The Songs of

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[37] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 15; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 20-21; the Arabic text specifically uses
the term, "rape" (*ightisab*).

[38] Anatole France, *Thaïs*, Robert B. Douglas trans. (Rcckville, Maryland: Wildside Press, 2005). For the
hagiographic story of St. Thaïs, see Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 76-84.

[39] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 16; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 21; my translation of the Arabic text.

[40] France, *Thaïs*, 57-58

[41] See the discussion earlier in this chapter and in 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, 64, and Sells, *Early Islamic
Mysticism*, 158.

[42] France, *Thaïs*, 138-141

[43] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 17; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 23; translation of the Arabic text.

Bilitis), a collection of erotic poems that was published in 1894.[44] Although this work was a favorite of early feminists, it is most notable today as a literary fraud. Louÿs composed most of the poems in *The Songs of Bilitis* himself.[45]

In the Introduction to *The Songs of Bilitis*, Louÿs claims that the poems came from the tomb of a courtesan named Bilitis on the island of Cyprus.[46] In a narrative that foreshadows in some ways Badawi's and El Sakkakini's accounts of Rabi'a's early life, he states that Bilitis grew up as a shepherdess (she was the daughter of a Greek father and a Phoenician mother) and that her life passed through three separate stages: her childhood in Asia Minor, her youth on the island of Lesbos where she was a companion of the poet Sappho (d. 570 BCE), and her career as a courtesan on Cyprus, where she was the lover of a woman singer named Mnasidika.   Louÿs even provides false documentary evidence to support his claims about Bilitis and her poems.[47] His division of Bilitis's life into three stages foreshadows the three-stage life story of Rabi'a as outlined by Badawi and El Sakkakini. However, the eroticism of Louÿs' work goes beyond what Badawi suggests for Rabi'a because while Bilitis trades in sex with men, her real lovers are women. By recalling Bilitis' lover Mnasadika and the other "maiden lovers" mentioned in *The Songs of Bilitis*, El Sakkakini also seems to suggest that Rabi'a engaged in similar behaviors. Although she does not state this directly, the possibility is worth noting.

Because of Badawi's speculations about Rabi'a's sexual experiences and El Sakkakini's speculations about her sexuality, it is not surprising to find that their versions of Rabi'a's *vita* were objectionable to more religiously inclined writers. For example, in *La Vie de Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (2000), Jamal-Eddine Benghal comments that their speculations are "difficult to admit. Everything about Rabi'a refutes this."[48] With respect to Badawi's representation Benghal states, "This version is apparently not founded on historical realities but is based on a phantasmagoric imagination."[49] One of the earliest critiques of Badawi's representation of Rabi'a can be found in *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya wa al-hayat al-ruhiyya fi-l-Islam* (Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and the Spiritual Life in Islam), by the Egyptian writer Taha 'Abd al-Baqi Surur (1957). Referring to the discrepancies between 'Attar's narrative and Badawi's *Martyr of Divine Love*, Surur accuses Badawi of lying about what 'Attar related about Rabi'a (*kadhaba al-'Attar fi-ma rawahu 'an Rabi'a*). Because of this academic dishonesty, he argues, Badawi's version of Rabi'a's *vita* is worthless: it "neither attains the level of true scholarship nor corresponds to historical reality nor the experience of faith."[50]

However, not every subsequent writer on Rabi'a was as willing as Surur was to dismiss Badawi completely. One way that some sought to retain his Existentialist focus on life-

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[44] For a recent reproduction of the original edition this work, see Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (Paris: Nabu Press, 2010). Many translations of this work can be found in English. In what follows I use Pierre Louÿs, *The Songs of Bilitis*, Alvah C. Bessie trans. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2010 reprint of the 1926 edition).

[45] For historical background information on *The Songs of Bilitis*, see the Wikipedia article at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki//The_Songs_of_Bilitis

[46] Louÿs, *Songs of Bilitis*, 13-20; *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, i-xii

[47] See Louÿs, *Songs of Bilitis* 19-20, where the reader is told that the tomb was discovered by the German archaeologist Herr G. Heim. Such a person never existed. See also, *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, x-xi.

[48] Benghal, *La Vie de Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, 48-49

[49] Ibid, 49

[50] Surur, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya wa-l-hayat al-ruhiyya fi al-Islam*, 44 and 46

experiences and yet preserve Rabi'a's reputation for virtue was to marry her off. As we saw in Chapter 3, Su'ad 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq uses this approach in her 1982 book, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya bayn al-ghina' wa al-buka'* (Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya Between Singing and Weeping). According to 'Abd al-Raziq, Rabi'a got married soon after attaining her freedom from captivity. Although she remained as pious as before, she attended to her husband's physical needs and only turned to celibacy after she became a widow. The original version of this story comes from Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa*, where it is not about Rabi'a, but about the unnamed wife of the ascetic Riyah al-Qaysi (d. 796 CE).[51] Apparently, 'Abd al-Raziq believed that Rabi'a was the wife of Riyah al-Qaysi. Paraphrasing Ibn al-Jawzi's text, she states: "Every night [Rabi'a] used to cook and attend to her husband, saying, 'Do you have a need?' When she had fulfilled them and left him, she would purify herself and bend her knees in prayer."[52] Although 'Abd al-Raziq accepted Badawi's premise that Rabi'a's early life included sexual experiences, her view of Islamic morality did not permit her to believe, as El Sakkakini did, that a sexually promiscuous woman could be predestined for sainthood.

El Sakkakini's Existentialist and feminist approach to Rabi'a's *vita* brings to mind another critique of Badawi's approach, *al-'Abida al-khashi'a, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, imamat al-'ashiqin wa al-mahzunin* (The Submissive Worshipper: Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, Leader of the Lovers and the Sorrowful), by 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Hifni (1991).[53] Hifni was a student of Badawi. In this work, he criticizes the atheism of Badawi and other Existentialist thinkers and seeks to restore the reputation that medieval hagiographers had established for Rabi'a as a chaste and pious Sufi.[54] Despite its polemical tone, Hifni's *Submissive Worshipper* is actually one of the more careful historical studies of Rabi'a in the Arabic language. He is concerned to maintain high standards of historical scholarship; in fact, he criticizes Badawi (correctly, in my opinion) for failing to live up to the standards that he upholds in his other works. For the most part, Hifni reproduces Badawi's arguments accurately and struggles to find a balance between the demands of faith and scholarship.

However, Hifni's book also suffers from factual errors that undermine his claim to portray the "true story" of Badawi's narrative. For example, Hifni claims that Badawi's Existentialist approach in *Martyr of Divine Love* was based on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Although Badawi may have taught Heidegger in the courses that Hifni attended at the University of Cairo, this assertion is untrue. As we have seen, Badawi based his study of Rabi'a on the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard.[55] Because of this initial mistake, Hifni also does not recognize Badawi's reliance on Kierkegaard's personality types of Aesthetic, Ethical, and Religious Man but instead attributes his portrayal of the Aesthetic part of Rabi'a's life to the influence of the feminist Existentialist philosopher Simone De Beauvoir (1908-1986).[56]

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[51] See Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*, vol. 2, 721.

[52] 'Abd al-Raziq, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, 57

[53] 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Hifni, *al-'Abida al-khashi'a: Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, imamat al-'ashiqin wa-l-mahzunin* (Cairo: Dar al-Irshad, 1991)

[54] See, for example, Ibid, 73, where Hifni describes Existentialism as an "atheistic method" (*madhhab ilhadi*) and claims that Badawi taught that "there was no existence outside of time, which means that he denied the Afterlife."

[55] Ibid, 69

[56] Ibid, 75

Here Hifni commits a major error of anachronism with respect to Badawi's sources. It would have been impossible for Badawi to have been influenced by Simone De Beauvoir because *The Second Sex*, the only work on which such an influence could have been based, was first published in 1949, after the publication of *Martyr of Divine Love*. Also unsupportable is Hifni's claim that Badawi's depiction of Rabi'a's sexuality was influenced by De Beauvoir's writings on "erotomania." [57]

Although Badawi could not have been influenced by Simone De Beauvoir, the situation is different for Widad El Sakkakini. First published in 1955, six years after *The Second Sex*, her book *The Sufi Lover* clearly reflects De Beauvoir's feminist view of Existentialism. When El Sakkakini states that Rabi'a "used her asceticism as a way to establish her reputation, assert her intellect, and avenge her past," we hear an echo of De Beauvoir's statement, "The [woman] mystic will torture her flesh to have the right to claim it; reducing it to abjection, she exalts it as the instrument of her salvation."[58] We hear another echo of De Beauvoir when El Sakkakini compares the young Rabi'a to the courtesans Thaïs and Bilitis. When De Beauvoir writes about the Greek courtesan (*hetaera*) in *The Second Sex*, she notes that the tragic irony of the courtesan's freedom is that it can only be negative: "Her independence is the reverse side of a thousand dependencies."[59] According to De Beauvoir, the price that the courtesan pays for her autonomy is a "systematic nihilism."[60] Thus, the sexual freedom of the courtesan is ultimately a form of self-alienation, not self-affirmation. In a similar way, El Sakkakini speculates on the emptiness and despair that Rabi'a must have felt in the Aesthetic period of her life. How, she wonders, can a woman truly seek salvation from the abuses of men in the arms of other men? For El Sakkakini, the hopelessness of Rabi'a's situation caused her to gain self-awareness through self-criticism. "And if she did succumb so young, from a need to survive and a fear of struggle; if she did become tempted by the pull of beauty and the promise of security and happiness, and was indeed swept away by the stream which had carried off many others like her, then no alternative would later have been left to her but self-analysis, reflection, and assessment."[61]

We have already seen in Badawi's interpretation of Kierkegaard's philosophy how the quest for autonomy depends on the experience of sin. We have also seen how in Badawi's view of Existentialism the self is inseparable from the body and thus can only be affirmed through the experiences of the body. Ultimately, the inability of the self to attain complete freedom because of the body's limitations leads to despair and the acute awareness of sin. For both Badawi and El Sakkakini, Rabi'a's period of excess created "dark nights of the soul" (*al-layali al-zalma'*), which

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[57] Ibid, 76; Simone De Beauvoir discusses erotomania in the chapter on narcissism in *The Second Sex*. She follows the French psychologist Clérambault in considering erotomania to be "a kind of professional derangement" in which a woman learns to value herself because she fantisizes that important men are in love with her. A close reading of these passages, however, reveals that erotomania could not have been relevant to Rabi'a's story, even for Badawi, because the pathology of this neurosis contradicts the Existentialist notion of life-experience as truth. As De Beauvoir states in this chapter, the narcissistic erotomaniac "looks at herself too much to see anything." See De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 678-680.

[58] El Sakkakini, *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 43-44; in *First Among Sufis* (30), Nabil Safwat translates this passage in the following way : "She used her asceticism as a way to freedom— to avenge her past." See also, Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 714.

[59] De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 616

[60] Ibid, 618

[61] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 16; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 21-22

led to episodes of despair and suffering.[62] These periods of despair eventually led to a "spiritual revolt" (*inqilab ruhi*), which compelled Rabi'a to turn away in remorse from the Aesthetic life toward the Ethical life and resume her former practices of piety and asceticism.[63] As El Sakkakini sees it, this was a healthy development because Rabi'a returned to religion freely: "Alteration of the self is a natural phenomenon," she writes. "None was ever born who remained the same person until he died; because life is like the earth itself, it has mountains and valleys, and we travel upon its surface, high and low, none knowing what his or her destiny might be."[64]

For Badawi, Rabi'a's transformation from Aesthetic Woman to Ethical Woman occurred when she realized that her attempt to find liberation through the body had failed. However, as an atheist, he disagrees with El Sakkakini that returning to God in repentance is a positive thing. For Badawi, instead of finding her true self in God, the repentant Rabi'a created a new form of servitude by fleeing from the world. Far from being a form of spiritual liberation, her new state of pious repentance was even more destructive than her former state of physical servitude.[65] He speculates that one of the causes of Rabi'a's repentance was a failed love affair. After the breakup of this affair, her restlessness and anxiety caused her to wander about the city of Basra visiting mosques and oratories, where she listened to sermons and attended Sufi sessions of invocation. The most important of these were conducted by the students of al-Hasan al-Basri. At one such gathering Rabi'a meets Riyah al-Qaysi, whom Badawi identifies (without attribution) as her spiritual master.[66]

For Badawi, the statements about repentance (*tawba*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*) that are attributed to Rabi'a in Sufi literature belong to the Ethical stage of her life. He considers them pessimistic (*silbi*) because they advocate the submission of the human will. Rather than act for herself, Rabi'a begs for God's mercy and at times even despairs of being worthy of it. Because he views self-surrender negatively, Badawi disagrees with El Sakkakini, who viewed salvation through God's mercy optimistically. For her, the notion of grace gives the believer hope that all sins can be forgiven. However, El Sakkakini does agree with Badawi that excessive fear of punishment in the afterlife can become a form of psychological illness.[67]

For "grace," Badawi uses the Arabic term *rida'*, which is most often translated as "satisfaction" or "pleasure."[68] For him, the concept of grace has more in common with Christian mysticism (*al-tasawwuf al-masihi*) than with Islam, and its use by Rabi'a demonstrates her reliance on Christian models of spirituality.[69] According to Badawi, one of the hallmarks of the Ethical personality type is an obsessive concern with time. Thus, he stresses how Rabi'a constantly repeats her supplications for forgiveness, fearing that her time will run out before she attains her goal.[70]

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[62] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 23

[63] Ibid, 22

[64] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 16; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 22

[65] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 23

[66] Ibid, 22; on Riyah or Rabah al-Qaysi, see Chapter 3.

[67] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 27-8; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 40-41

[68] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 24

[69] Ibid; Badawi even suggests that Rabi'a may have had a Christian background.

[70] Ibid, 25

To prepare the reader for Rabi'a's final transition from Ethical Woman to Religious Woman, Badawi creates an ideal model of "the True Sufi: the Sufi in his existential meaning" (*al-sufi al-haqq, al-sufi bi-l-ma'na al-wujudi*).[71] In doing this, he sets up a distinction between the Ethical and Religious personality types that corresponds to the different states of mind that are revealed in Rabi'a's statements on repentance. For Badawi, True (i.e., Existentialist) Sufism is dynamic rather than static, active rather than passive, and optimistic rather than pessimistic. To illustrate the difference between optimistic and pessimistic forms of Sufism, he uses two dicta attributed to Rabi'a that are usually understood to mean the same thing. In the first dictum (which goes back in origin to the late tenth-century Sufi Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi), Rabi'a says: "I seek God's forgiveness for my lack of sincerity in saying, 'I seek God's forgiveness'" (*Astaghfirullah min qillati sidqi fi qawli astaghfirullah*).[72] In the second dictum (which goes back in origin to the seventeenth-century Egyptian Sufi 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Munawi), Rabi'a states: "Our supplication for forgiveness needs its own supplication for forgiveness because of the nonexistence of sincerity in it" (*Istighfaruna yahtaju ila istighfarin li-'adami al-sidqi fihi*).[73]

Badawi considers the first dictum pessimistic because it reflects Rabi'a's existential anxiety and awareness of sin through the bodily senses. By contrast, he sees the second dictum as optimistic because it affirms a general truth about the human condition.[74] He explains that the point of the second dictum is that sincere repentance cannot be achieved quickly. In fact, "A person cannot achieve it even if it takes all of his life."[75] For Badawi, the difference between pessimistic and optimistic types of spirituality depends on the notion of temporality (*al-zamaniyya*). Repetitive actions that others might see as obsessive-compulsive are signs for him that the ascetic is not a pessimist: she is not caught in an endless cycle of remorse and self-recrimination. Instead, she seeks Eternal life in an active way. The ascetic acts compulsively because she is afraid that she will not attain her goal in the limited time that she has.

For Badawi, compulsive attention to worship marks the transition from the Ethical to the Religious personality type. For Widad El Sakkakini, however, the transition from the Ethical type to the Religious type depends on the Sufi's ability to assimilate what she calls "the tolerant teachings of Islam" (*ta'alim al-Islam al-samha*).[76] This optimistic perspective depends on accepting the world as it is and realizing that everything exists as God intended it to be. For El Sakkakini, Rabi'a's manifestation of this attitude at the end of her period of repentance opens the door to what she calls "active" or "practical" Sufism (*al-tasawwuf al-'amali*).[77]

At this point it is necessary to turn once again to Badawi's definition of Religious Man in *Studies in Existential Philosophy*: "[Religious Man] desires the discourse that is spoken in Heaven and touches the hand of the Spirit of those spirits that are born in the supernal. If

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[71] Ibid

[72] See Kalabadhi, *al-Ta'arruf*, 72-73 and Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, 83

[73] Badawi incorrectly attributes this quotation to Ibn al-Jawzi, when in fact Ibn al-Jawzi quotes the previous version. Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 25 and R. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women* (Ibn al-Jawzi Appendix), 278-9.

[74] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 25

[75] Ibid.

[76] El Sakkakini, *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 41; *First Among Sufis*, 28

[77] El Sakkakini, *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 85; *First Among Sufis*, 55; in his translation of El Sakkakini's work Nabil Safwat calls this "authentic Sufism."

[Religious Man] is a woman, her speech calls out to God for her to attain divine grace and reach the level of the Soul at Peace. All of [Religious Man's] efforts are directed toward attaining the eternal and everlasting life that his mind imagines to be lived within the divine embrace."[78] As this definition implies, the transition from the Ethical type to the Religious type is not abrupt but occurs over an extended period, as Religious Man grows out of his concern for time and the world and seeks his true self in the Eternal. In a similar way, Badawi's Rabi'a becomes Religious Woman by practicing repentance, which marks her detachment from time and the world. However, as a woman she cannot attain full autonomy and independence, even in her search for spirituality. Thus, she seeks divine grace through intimacy with another as a way of attaining the tranquility that she desires. Badawi puts the matter this way: "In repentance, Rabi'a started a new beginning and a new page in her spiritual life was opened. This was a mixture (*mazij*) of anxiety (*qalaq*), remorse (*istighfar*) and desire (*shawq*) for the new Beloved that she had chosen for herself."[79]

In other words, even as Religious Woman, Rabi'a was still not free of her former existence, including her emotional states and experiences. To illustrate this point, Badawi introduces another new plot element to her *vita*, which would become central to her depiction on film. He concludes that Rabi'a's path through the Aesthetic to the Ethical and finally to the Religious personality type was prompted by a failed love affair. The proof of this, he says, can be found in her mystical poetry, whose allegorical statements about divine love reflect the memory of an actual relationship. For Badawi, the love that Rabi'a expresses for God in her poetry developed as a form of compensation for this love affair: in her poems she replaces an imperfect human lover with a perfect divine lover. In Badawi's view, virtually every statement by Rabi'a on the subject of Love represents an attempt to substitute a divine lover for a physical lover. Among the many examples that he gives of this, is the early saying of Rabi'a that was recorded by the Sufi Muhasibi: 'Night has come, the darkness has mingled, and every lover is left alone with his beloved. Now I am alone with you, my Beloved!'"[80]

Along with her Love mysticism, Badawi also suggests that Rabi'a embarked on a new form of spritiual practice in this stage of her life. This was *khulla*— the practice of friendship or intimacy as a spiritual method— which she (allegedly) learned from her teacher Riyah al-Qaysi.[81] According to Badawi, the doctrine of *khulla* provides a bridge between asceticism and Love mysticism by creating a way for the ascetic to transition from a spirituality based on remorse to a spirituality based on love. In this method, the Sufi practices her love for God by loving and behaving altruistically toward her Sufi colleagues. Although Riyah al-Qaysi has a generally good reputation among Sufi writers, some non-Sufi heresiographers, such as the Hanbali al-Khushaysh an-Nisa'i (d. 867 CE), accused him of believing that intimacy with God allowed him to take liberties with the moral teachings of Islam. According to Khushaysh, such practices included licentiousness with women and young boys.[82]

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[78] Badawi, *Dirasat fi-l-falsafa al-wujudiyya*, 45

[79] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 32

[80] Muhasibi, *al-Qasd wa-l-ruju' ila Allah*, 104

[81] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 64-66

[82] Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1985), 100 and 118-122

Badawi was inclined to agree with this view. For him, love is an experience or feeling (*shu'ur*) that transcends both good and evil. By seeking a higher form of love, the Sufi practitioner of *khulla* goes beyond conventional morality. Some Sufis allegedly approximated the enjoyment (*ladhdha*) of intimacy with God by becoming physically intimate with other Sufis (*al-takhallul*). "In this state," says Badawi, "they are beyond the need for ordinary moral values; in other words, they are above their level."[83] For Badawi, the outward manifestation of *khulla* is disrespect for the Shari'a; its inward manifestation is disrespect for all worldly objects of veneration, including the Ka'ba in Mecca. This is how he interprets the stories in 'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* where Rabi'a seems to disparage or disrespect the Ka'ba. It is also in his discussion of *khulla* that he comes closest to suggesting, as El Sakkakini does, that Rabi'a may have engaged in inappropriate forms of intimacy, even after becoming a Sufi.

Badawi's fascination (one could even say obsession) with *khulla*, like his attempt to revise the narrative of Rabi'a's early life to fit Kierkegaard's model of Aesthetic Man, was based on his conviction that the development of the inner self depends on outer experiences. In *Martyr of Divine Love*, he associates the concept of *khulla* with Religious Man by using two of Rabi'a's alleged poems as illustrations: these are the famous Poem of the Two Loves (see Chapter 3) and another poem attributed to Rabi'a that originally came from the Qur'an commentary of the Sufi Ahmad Ibn 'Ata' (d. 922 CE). In its original version, this poem is not Rabi'a's but is attributed to Ibn 'Ata himself.[84] Besides mistakenly attributing the poem to Rabi'a, Badawi uses a version of that is worded differently from the original. Presumably, this revised version better suited his belief that Rabi'a's intimate discourses (*munajat*) with God were based on her experiences of intimacy with a human lover:

> You have become one with the way of my soul;
> This is why the Friend (*al-khalil*) is called, "The Intimate."
>
> You are in my thoughts, my hopes, and my speech
> And in my repose, whenever I desire a place to rest.[85]

To Badawi, this poem expresses a sense of mutual possession or ownership (*milk*), which replicates the feelings that two lovers have for each other. As the poem suggests, the relationship between the sincere worshipper and God is a form of co-dependency. Although Rabi'a feels that she possesses her Beloved in her heart, in reality both her identity and her feelings are the Beloved's possessions. Because she feels that the Beloved is "one with the way of her soul," every action that she performs— even those that appear to transgress the Law— are the Beloved's own actions and thus are permissible by way of divine indulgence.[86] For Badawi, the danger of Rabi'a's Love mysticism lies in the excessive nature of the Religious personality type. He interprets this poem as foreshadowing the heresy of the Sufi martyr Abu Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922 CE), whose practice of *khulla* led him to equate his human self with the divine Self, which

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[83] Ibid, 65-66

[84] See Paul Nwiya, *Trois Oeuvres inédites*, 46.

[85] Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*, 63; in Ibn 'Ata's version the second verse states: "Whenever I utter a word, you are in my speech/ and when I am silent, you are my ardent desire (*al-ghalil*)." Nwiya, *Trois Oeuvres inédites*, 46

[86] Ibid

ultimately led to his execution. According to Badawi, had Rabi'a not kept the full nature of her Love mysticism a secret, she too might have been executed for her beliefs.[87]

Widad El Sakkakini had no such fears of Rabi'a's mystical excesses. For her, Rabi'a's mysticism was a form of "practical" or action-oriented Sufism (*al-tasawwuf al-'amali*). "Practical Sufism" was El Sakkakini's version of Badawi's "True Sufism." In contrast with Badawi's model, however, the Sufism of El Sakkakini's Rabi'a is more pragmatic and down-to-earth: she rejects "theoretical Sufism (*al-tasawwuf al-nazari*) based on ecstatic experiences, fantasies, and mysteries, lost in raptures and the unknown."[88] However, like Badawi, El Sakkakini believed that Rabi'a had multiple lovers in the early period of her life. By substituting an inward mystical love for these outward loves, she could reach new levels of understanding that led to deeper ways of introspection. As El Sakkakini states in *The Sufi Lover*: "[Rabi'a] did not seek her true self outside of herself at all. Rather, she perceived her true self within herself (*fa-innaha lam tanzur kharija nafsiha fa-hasb wa innama nazarat fi nafsiha dhataha*)."[89] For this reason, El Sakkakini's Rabi'a did not need to practice *khulla* like Badawi's Rabi'a. Instead, through an inner process of self-reflection she realized the truth of the early philosophers, who said, "Know thyself," and the truth of the Qur'an, which states, "In the Earth are signs for the faithful, as well as in yourselves; will you not then see?" (Qur'an 51:20-21)[90]

II.   RABI'A THE FILM ICON

In 1960, the Egyptian screenwriter Saniya Qurra'a (d. 1990), combined the tropes of Rabi'a the Ascetic and Rabi'a the Lover in a book titled, *'Arus al-zuhd: Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (The Bride of Asceticism: Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya). This work, which was published by the Egyptian National Press Office, was written in response to the popular acclaim of Qurra'a's radio drama on the life of Rabi'a, which was broadcast on Radio Cairo in 1955. A revised version of the script for this radio play, expanded into a plot outline and titled "The Long Story" (*al-Qissa al-tawila*), comprises more than half of the text of Qurra'a's book.[91] A few years later, this expanded script became the basis for the screenplay of the 1963 movie, *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, directed by Mustapha Niazi with screenplay by Saniya Qurra'a and Mustapha Abdel Fatah. This film, which also features songs by the Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum (1898-1975), has become so famous that it now provides most of the "facts" that the Muslim public thinks it knows about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, not only in the Arab world but also as far away as Indonesia.

In this and the previous chapter, Roland Barthes' concept of the "reality effect" has been discussed as an important aspect of the Rabi'a myth. In the essay, "The Reality Effect," Barthes notes that the sense of realism that is produced by this effect is enhanced by creating the illusion

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[87] Ibid, 67

[88] El Sakkakini, *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 85; *First Among Sufis*, 55

[89] El Sakkakini, *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 84; *First Among Sufis*, 54; the translator Nabil Safwat gets a bit carried away in his rendering of this passage: "She moved in search of her own lost self, which had far preceded her. With extended wings in a higher timeless world, her Self appeared, signalling her to follow."

[90] El Sakkakini, *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 84; *First Among Sufis*, 54

[91] Saniya Qurra'a, *'Arus al-zuhd: Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* (Cairo: Maktab al-Sahafa al-Dawli [National Press Office], 1960), 91-228

of "having been there."[92] This is why realistic literary descriptions such as Flaubert's description of Rouen and Badawi's description of eighth-century Basra are so evocative. The sense of "having been there" in the reader's mind reinforces the reality effect and increases the verisimilitude of the story.[93] In the same essay, Barthes also discusses the importance of photographs in conveying the impression of verisimilitude.[94] The realism of a photograph conveys the sense of "having been there" even more effectively than a literary description does. This confirms the truth of the saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words."

In another essay, "Leaving the Movie Theatre" (1975), Barthes discusses how the "lifelikeliness" of a story can be enhanced even further by being made into a film. The verisimilitude of the film's depiction of events is expressed through a process that Barthes calls "cinematographic hypnosis."[95] The person who watches a movie in a theater is like a voyeur peering through a keyhole. Cut off from the world in the dark theater, the viewer feels that she uniquely perceives what is really going on in the movie. With respect to the story on the screen, the experience of being in the theater creates a contradictory mixture of personal involvement and detachment. Barthes explains this situation in the following way: "I must be in the story (there must be verisimilitude), but I must also be *elsewhere*: in a slightly disengaged image-repetoire, that is what I must have— like a scrupulous, conscientious, organized, in a word *difficult* fetishist, that is what I require of the film and of the situation in which I go looking for it."[96]

For Barthes, the film-image acts as a powerful lure: "I fling myself upon it like an animal upon the scrap of 'lifelike' rag held out to him; and of course, it sustains in me the misreading attached to Ego and to image-repetoire."[97] Because of the power of the cinematic lure, the moviegoer is "glued" to the representation of the story on film and experiences within herself "its coalescence, its analogical security, its naturalness, its 'truth.'"[98] Although the movie on the screen is often an interpretation of a book (i.e., an interpretation of an interpretation), and thus is even further removed from obective reality than the original work itself, the "truth" of the story on film seems more natural than the truth of the original book. The point that Barthes makes is especialy important with respect to historical movies, period pieces, and docudramas. The sense of perceived "truth" that is evoked by the representation of a story on film is more often than not more powerful than a "truth" evoked by a book. Because of its power to involve the viewer in its representations, what Barthes calls the "misreading" of objective reality that the film imparts creates an aura of verisimilitude that is even harder to resist than the verisimilitude of a work of literature. For this reason, says Barthes, film as a genre is inherently ideological. For him every movie is a form of propaganda.[99]

Because of the reaction against postmodernism that still exists in the fields of Religious Studies and History, it is important to note that this view of versimilitude in literary and cinematic

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[92] Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in idem, *The Rustle of Language*, 146-7

[93] See also the section on "Witness as a Category Entitlement," in Potter, *Representing Reality*, 165-166.

[94] Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in idem, *The Rustle of Language*, 146

[95] Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theatre," in idem, *The Rustle of Language*, 347

[96] Ibid; Jonathan Potter refers to this as the perception of "out-there-ness." See idem, *Representing Reality*, "Constructing Out-there-ness," 150-175.

[97] Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theatre," in idem, *The Rustle of Language*, 347

[98] Ibid

[99] Ibid, 340-9

representations is not confined to post-structuralists like Barthes. In 1957, more than ten years before Barthes first introduced the concept of the reality effect, Mircea Eliade discussed much the same thing in his book, *The Sacred and the Profane*. The only difference was that the context of his remarks referred to myth rather than to literature:

> The cinema, that "dream factory," takes over and employs countless mythical motifs— the fight between hero and monster, initiatory combats and ordeals, paridigmatic figures and images (the maiden, the hero, the paradisal landscape, hell, and so on). Even reading includes a mythological function, not only because it replaces the recitation of myths in archaic socieites and the oral literature that still lives in the rural communities of Europe, but particularly because, through reading, the modern man succeeds in obtaining an "escape from time" comparable to the "emergence from time" effected by myths. Whether the modern man "kills" time with a detective story or enters such a foreign temporal universe as is represented by any novel, reading projects him out of his personal duration and incorporates him into other rhythms, makes him live another "history.[100]

The Egyptian movie *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* is an excellent example of what Barthes and Eliade are talking about. When used in an imaginative way as a historiographical document, it illustrates how the reality effect of a representation on film can turn the dramatic "misreading" of a purportedly historical figure into an accepted fact. Using the film as a historiographical document also provides a good illustration of Aleksei Losev's phenomenology of myth. In fact, the feature film is one of the best examples of Losev's view of how a myth works: "[Myth] is always a manifestation, immediate and naïve reality, a seen and tangibly felt sculptural quality of life."[101] Losev would agree with Barthes and Eliade that because of its power to evoke an immediate sense of reality, a movie is better at creating a myth than a book is. To say, as Barthes does, that the genre of film is ideological, is merely another way of saying that film is mythological. What Barthes calls "ideology" Losev terms "absolute mythology." Rabi'a the Icon, especially since her depiction in the movie *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, has become an example of what Losev terms an *absolute myth*. This is because the myth of Rabi'a as an iconic figure has become self-referential and the truth she represents is tautological: "No one can ever set any obstacles or boundaries either to this being or to this myth."[102]

For Losev, absolute myths like the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya are constructed out of *relative myths*; thus, to trace the genealogy of an absolute myth is to trace the genealogy of the relative myths out of which the absolute myth is constructed. In the present study, the relative myths used to construct the myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya are the tropes and master narratives that we have discussed so far: Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, Rabi'a the Lover, Rabi'a the Sufi, and Rabi'a the Icon. This chapter has introduced three more relative myths: Rabi'a the Existentialist, Rabi'a the Feminist, and Rabi'a the Reformed Sinner. Through the process of mythmaking, says Losev, the absolute myth is "crowned by a *magical name*."[103] Calling a myth by a "magical name" means that the logic of history has yielded to the symbolic logic of the mythical image: all categories of description must now be considered in light of this name. In

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[100] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Willard R. Trask, trans, (San Diego, London, and New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1987), 205
[101] Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, 100
[102] Ibid, 190
[103] Ibid

this way, the magical name, "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya," has spread throughout the Islamic world. Today, no mention of this name can fail to evoke one or more of the "relative myths" (i.e., the tropes and master narratives) that are associated with it.

However, as we saw in Chapter 5, for an absolute myth or a magical name to have such power, a narrative or *outline* must lie behind it. Today's myth of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya could not exist without the dialectical process of narrative construction and reconstruction by 'Attar in *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, by Smith in *Rabi'a the Mystic*, by Badawi in *Martyr of Divine Love*, by El Sakkakini in *The Sufi Lover*, and by Qurra'a in her screenplay for the movie *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*. By introducing the figure of Rabi'a to radio and film, Qurra'a added a third dimension to Rabi'a the Icon that greatly increased the power of her myth. However, we must not make the mistake of viewing the Rabi'a of film as the culmination of a developmental process. Although there is a chronological order to this process, the narratives it has produced are discontinuous. As Michel Foucault reminds us, most unities of discourse involve the outside imposition of an artificial principle of coherence.[104] A close reading of Qurra'a's book *The Bride of Asceticism* and a careful viewing of the film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* will quickly cure the researcher of any notions of true developmental unity or coherence. In effect, despite the fact that it was influenced by Badawi's work, Qurra'a's screenplay for the film has become a separate and unique basis for a new representation of Rabi'a's story.

In the first place, Qurra'a has less concern for historical accuracy than any other writer on Rabi'a since 'Attar. Although she lists a number of consulted sources (*masadir al-kitab*) at the end of *The Bride of Asceticism*, she often does not make use of them. In addition, she gets many of her bibliographical references wrong. For example, she cites a work by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350 CE) called *Safwat al-safwa* (sic.), when she clearly intends Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa*.[105] Ibn Qayyim wrote no work titled *Safwat al-safwa*. Even worse, Qurra'a cites some works that do not seem to have existed in any form whatsoever. For example, under (Louis) Massignon she cites his well-known book, *Essay on the Origin of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*. However, she also attributes a work to Massignon titled, "The History of Miracles in the Islamic Lands" (*Ta'rikh al-khawariq fi-l-bilad al-Islamiyya*). The complete bibliography of Louis Massignon's works on the web site of the Association des Amis de Louis Massignon does not mention any work by this title. However, the worst (and most humorous) example of Qurra'a bibliographical carelessness is in her citation of Margaret Smith's *Rabi'a the Mystic*. Instead of providing the correct title, she calls this work "Rabi'a the Mysterious" (*Rabi'a al-ghamida*) and cites its author as "Margaret Mitchell."[106] Imagine the surprise to find that the author of Smith's *Rabi'a the Mystic* is actually the same person as the author of *Gone with the Wind*!

In the second place, although Qurra'a depends heavily on Badawi's *Martyr of Divine Love* for the historical section of *Bride of Asceticism* (this section is titled, "Rabi'a . . . In Reality," *Rabi'a . . . fi al-haqiqa*), she does not adhere as closely to 'Attar's master narrative of Rabi'a's *vita* as Badawi does. Instead, her screenplay changes much of 'Attar's story and adds new events and characters to better dramatize Badawi's characterization of the Aesthetic Rabi'a.

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[104] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 21-22

[105] Qurra'a, *'Arus al-zuhd*, 231; *Sifat al-safwa* is commonly misrendered as *Safwat al-safwa* in the modern Muslim world.

[106] Qurra'a, *'Arus al-zuhd*, 231

In addition, she adds new characters to the story, such as the Egyptian Sufi Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri (d. 859 CE), to reinforce the notion that Rabi'a had something to do with Egypt. Perhaps because of the strong Egyptian nationalism that prevailed in the Nasser era when her screenplay was written, Qurra'a attempts to appropriate Rabi'a of Basra for Egypt by placing her anachronistically in the company of the most famous Egyptian Sufi of the early period.[107] However, the Egyptian hagiographer 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Munawi, the original source for the trope of Rabi'a the Egyptian (see Chapter 5), is not mentioned in her bibliography.

The film version of Rabi'a's life-story that most closely corresponds to 'Attar's original version is another Egyptian movie that is now all but forgotten because of the fame of Qurra'a's film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*. This film is *Shahidat al-hubb al-ilahi* (translated in English as "Witness to the Divine Love" and in French as *Amour Divin*), a black-and-white movie that was released in 1962, just one year before the more famous film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*. Directed by Abbas Kamel and starring the Lebanese actress Aida Helal (1925-1987) as Rabi'a, the debt of this film to Badawi's book is apparent in its Arabic title, which is almost identical to Badawi's *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi*. Today, the print of this film appears to be lost and all that remains of it is a recorded version of the soundtrack, which was rebroadcast on Radio Cairo in 2008. Apart from this recording, the only remaining artifacts of the film are posters, which exist in collections of Arab film-poster art in the U.S. and the Middle East.

Although this earlier movie follows Badawi's and 'Attar's narratives more closely than does the film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, it also takes liberties with Rabi'a's *vita* for dramatic purposes.[108] The overall message of *Shahidat al-hubb al-ilahi* is that spiritual love is superior to worldly love. Rabi'a's father is portrayed as a fisherman to set the scene for his poverty and to allow him to reflect on the wealth flowing into Basra through the port of al-Ubulla. Rabi'a's three sisters are Fatima, Buthayna, and Sukayna. These names do not appear in any extant hagiographical or historical source. The main new character in the film is the "Emir Rabi' ibn Ziyad," who takes over as Emir of Basra when Ibn Zadan, the Emir of the medieval accounts, dies. During the period of Rabi'a's captivity, Ibn Ziyad hears of her beauty and musical talents and purchases her. This makes Rabi'a's owner and the Emir of Basra the same person, thus resolving a contradiction in later medieval accounts of how she could be a captive slave and the object of the Emir of Basra's desire at the same time.

Rabi'a meets the ascetic Riyah al-Qaysi (called "Rabah" in the film) when he comes to visit the Emir's palace. She asks him, "What is the way to God?" Following Sufi doctrine, he tells her that the way to God is based on renunciation (*zuhd*), desire (*'ishq*), intimacy (*uns*), repentance (*tawba* and *'uzr*), thankfulness (*shukr*), Love (*mahabba*), certainty (*yaqin*), satisfaction (*rida*), and inspiration (*ilham*). Then Rabi'a asks how to obtain a vision of God. Rabah replies, "Can you see a rose (*ward*) in the letters *waw*, *ra'*, or *dal*? Go and seek God in the reality of His Name. Seek the moon in the heavens, not in its reflection in water. Purify yourself with the remembrance and worship of God to reach the Divine Light."

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[107] Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri died nearly ffity years after Rabi'a and accounts about him, whether autobiographical or written by others, never mention that he met Rabi'a in person. If he met any famous Rabi'a, it more likely would have been Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Damascus.

[108] For the soundtrack of the film *Shahidat al-hubb al-ilahi* see the following web site: egyzaman.com/post.php?(the rest of the address is in Arabic)=r-shahidat-alhubb-alilahi-rabi'a-al'adawiyya-rushdi-abaza-wa-a'ida-hilal-istima'-awnlayin-tahmil

After meeting Rabah al-Qaysi, Rabi'a spends her free time singing and composing poems about Love. When the Emir wants to be with her, she tells him to go to his wife instead. Rabi'a then begins to go out of the palace at night to pray, study, and perform invocations with her teacher Rabah al-Qaysi. When she leaves the palace she takes a companion named 'Abda with her. This refers to 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal, a character who, as we have seen, first appears in Ibn al-Jawzi account of Rabi'a in *Sifat al-safwa*. In the film, another palace servant named Khalid informs the Emir of Rabi'a's nightly sojourns. When the Emir confesses his love for Rabi'a, he hears a voice telling him to free her. Becoming jealous, he accuses her of practicing magic and punishes Rabi'a in his anger. When he hears the voice again, he now believes it to come from Satan. Rabi'a perseveres under repeated torture and composes new verses about the sadness of a sinful life. When the Emir hears the voice again, he realizes that it is from God and releases Rabi'a from her captivity.

Rabi'a the Ascetic is depicted in the film *Shahidat al-hubb al-ilahi* as living in a tower (*sawma'*) in the desert. Several of the miracles that are related of her in later medieval sources are depicted in the film, including one in which she turns a thief toward righteousness. These episodes continue the theme of dramatic conversion that originated with 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi. First, Rabi'a is converted to the path of righteousness by her teacher al-Qaysi; next, through her example of righteousness, she converts the servant Khalid, then the Emir of Basra, and finally her companion 'Abda. The Emir comes to visit Rabi'a at her cell in the desert, again professing his love for her and offering whatever she might want if she marries him. Rabi'a tells the Emir that she belongs only to God and says, "How can I ask for the world from one who does not own it?" (See the discussion of this saying in Chapter 1.) When she dies, a supernatural voice says, "The grave possesses her body but her soul is with God." The film ends with the recitation of the Qur'anic verse that was recited at Rabi'a's death in 'Attar's narrative: "Oh soul at peace, return unto your Lord, well pleased and well pleasing" (Qur'an 89:27-29).

The film *Shahidat al-hubb al-ilahi* conveys a more spiritual message than the more famous film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*. However, both films were produced in a time of resurgence of interest in religion in the Egyptian cinema.[109] Although these films appeared in the secular Nasser era, they were part of a general response to fears about the loss of religious consciousness among the Egyptian public. Most other religious films in this period dealt with famous battles and historical events in the history of Islam. Several, however, starting with the film, *al-Sayyid al-Badawi* in 1952 and ending with *Shayma'* in 1972, dealt with the lives of Islamic religious personalities. The scripts of these films were not concerned with historical accuracy but focused instead on how their main characters incorporated the Islamic creed and moral values in their lives. In some films, including the two movies about Rabi'a, Sufis appear as exemplars of Islamic piety and spirituality. The screenwriters and directors of the films focused on key events in the lives of the main characters for dramatic effect. The films also included music and dancing

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[109] The information in this paragraph comes from the blog, *Cinema Tripoli* by Salim Ramadan (cinematripoli.blogspot.com). See blogpost_13html, "al-Malamih al-'amma li-l-sharit al-dini fi al-sinima al-'arabiyya (General Aspects of Religious Movies in the Arab Cinema). Most of the information in the blog comes from the book by Mahmud Qasim, *Surat al-adyan fi al-sinima al-Misriyya* (The Image of Religions in the Egyptian Cinema) (Cairo: Wizarat al-Thaqafa al-Markaz al-Qawmi li-l-Sinima [Ministry of Culture, People's Center for Cinema], 1997). The text of this book is accessible through the web site of the Biblioteca Alexandria in Alexandria, Egypt. However, a problem with the web site limited my access to only the first 21 pages.

to capture the public's imagination. The most popular motifs conveyed in the films included suffering for one's beliefs, the struggle of Islam versus unbelief, dramatic conversion experiences, women as temptresses, male religious figures as women's moral guides, and repentance. Film production in Egypt at this time was both multi-religious and multinational. The producers, directors, and actors of these religious films included Muslims, Christians, and Jews, and their nationalities included Egyptians, Sudanese, Lebanese, and Syrians.

It is still rare today for women to play a major role in Egyptian film production other than as actors. Saniya Qurra'a was not only one of the first women to write a screenplay for the Egyptian cinema but she also claims to have been the first person of any gender to adapt Rabi'a's story for radio and cinema. She wrote her first script on Rabi' in 1952 and submitted it to Studio Misr in 1953. The radio play based on this script aired in August 1955. As noted previously, historical accuracy was not a major consideration for Qurra'a, despite her claims to the contrary. Besides well established characters such as Sufyan al-Thawri and 'Abda bint Shawwal (*sic.*), other characters in the radio play include al-Hasan al-Basri, the ascetic Thawban ibn Ibrahim (the actual name of the Egyptian Sufi Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri), and a spiritual "voice," played by the actress Laila Sabunji.[110] Both al-Hasan al-Basri and Dhu'l-Nun are anachronistic characters: Hasan lived too early to associate with Rabi'a and Dhu'l-Nun lived too late. Qurra'a states that her interest in popularizing the life of Rabi'a was to provide a taste of the Sufi experience. However, her knowledge of Sufism was minimal. Ironically, most of what she says about Sufism is based on the anti-Sufi works of the Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya. Like Badawi, she also saw Sufism as contrary to the strict pietism and asceticism of early Islam.[111]

The most important aspect of Badawi's literary characterization of Rabi'a to appear in the 1963 film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* is Qurra'a's portrayal of her as a restless soul. The film begins with Rabi'a as an orphan (a sort of Arab version of "Little Orphan Annie"), who lives with an old beggar woman in the countryside of southern Iraq. Rabi'a becomes interested in seeking a more exciting life in Basra when she hears about 'Aliyya, a courtesan who returns to her village from Basra with fine clothes and jewelry. In "The Long Story" novella that appears in Qurra'a's book *The Bride of Asceticism*, Rabi'a states that her life in the village is characterized by three things: poverty, misery, and bad luck. However, using a pun that is probably intentional, she predicts that the fourth part of her life (*hayatuha al-rabi'a*) will be characterized by good luck.[112] On her way to Basra, Rabi'a overhears thieves plotting to rob a rich man named 'Isam al-Din. She warns 'Isam and saves his life. He admires Rabi'a's courage and innocence, and her dreams of a better life, so he gives her money to help her. On the way to Basra, thieves try to capture Rabi'a but the Sufi Thawban (Dhu'l-Nun) saves her, and predicts that one day she will attain a high station in the way of repentance.

The next part of the film reveals its debt to Badawi's portrayal of Rabi'a as Aesthetic Woman and depicts her life as a courtesan and performer. Rabi'a goes to Basra to look for 'Isam al-Din, with whom she is infatuated. Reflecting Badawi's evocation of Basra's split personality, the film portrays Rabi'a as wandering through the streets of the city, amazed by the bazaars filled with goods of every description. Belly-dance music plays in the background. In the bazaars, she sees religious preachers competing with slave dealers for attention. While in the bazaar she

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[110] Qurra'a, *'Arus al-zuhd*, 6

[111] Ibid 9-16; the reference to Ibn Taymiyya is on p. 10.

[112] Ibid, 96

encounters the wife of a procurer of dancers and singing-girls, who invites her home. There she is trained in dancing and singing. The wife of the merchant becomes jealous when she sees how Rabi'a captures the hearts of men with her beauty and grace. 'Isam al-Din finds Rabi'a at a party where she is performing and pays all of the money he has to possess her. Later, he is summoned to lead a caravan and leaves Rabi'a with his friend, the merchant Khalil of Al 'Atik. 'Isam gives Rabi'a to Khalil as collateral for a business loan. Rabi'a is heartbroken and begins to dress modestly because she yearns for 'Isam.

Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was played in the film by the Egyptian actress Nabila Ebaid (b. 1945), who remains one of Egypt's most popular celebrities. In 2005, Egyptian tabloids linked her romantically with 'Amr Musa, the former head of the Arab League and a recent candidate for President of Egypt. Nabila began her film career as a dancer and the first half of the film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* highlights her dancing abilities. Unlike the posters for the earlier film *Shahidat al-hubb al-ilahi*, which depict Rabi'a as veiled, the posters for the film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* show Nabila as Rabi'a unveiled and in a romantic pose with the actor who played 'Isam al-Din. The choice of the beautiful and voluptuous actress Nabila Ebaid for the role of Rabi'a not only highlights the importance of Badawi's trope of Rabi'a as Aesthetic Woman in the film. There are also indications that Qurra'a consulted Widad El Sakkakini's book *The Sufi Lover* for her screenplay. Although El Sakkakini is not mentioned in the bibliography of Qurra'a's book *Bride of Asceticism*, her work clearly was influential because the film portrays the merchant Khalil of Al 'Atik as trying to rape Rabi'a. As noted above, this imagined episode in Rabi'a's life is unique to El Sakkakini's book.

Khalil of Al 'Atik is the villain of the movie. He lusts after Rabi'a and gives her money and jewels, but to no avail. When he tries to rape her, she fights him off. While she is a prisoner in his house, Rabi'a leans out of the window and listens to the religious singers (*munshidin*) in the street, singing songs about the love of God. However, her heart still belongs to 'Isam al-Din and she continues to wait for his return. When 'Isam returns he comes to Khalil to pay back his loan. Although Khalil allows 'Isam to see Rabi'a, his jealousy causes him to refuse the ransom and he resolves to murder his friend. Rabi'a is heartbroken. Another singing-girl convinces Rabi'a to forget her past by indulging in a wanton life of singing, dancing, and drinking. Rabi'a does this and finally gives her body to Khalil. After this, the courtesan 'Aliyya sees Rabi'a and warns her that her charms will be worthless when she becomes older. To help her, she tries to ransom Rabi'a from Khalil. Khalil refuses the offer and takes Rabi'a with him on a hunt. When they stop to rest, the Sufi Thawban (Dhu'l-Nun) meets Rabi'a once again and preaches to her. She tells Thawban, "Love is my religion but the wine-glass is my way" (*al-hubb dini wa al-ka's madhhabi*). Thawban preaches to her about the life of asceticism. When she returns to Basra and again hears the religious singers in the street, she begins to weep out of remorse for her sinful way of life. Rabi'a resolves to reform her life and takes Rabah ibn 'Amr (al-Qaysi) as her teacher.

The film depicts Rabi'a as studying under several figures from medieval hagiographies: al-Hasan al-Basri, Sufyan al-Thawri, 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd, and Hayyuna. As we have seen, the historical Rabi'a could not have studied under Hasan and Sufyan was most likely Rabi'a's student, not her teacher. Of these figures, only Hayyuna could possibly have been Rabi'a's teacher. Just as in the film *Shahidat al-hubb al-ilahi*, a woman named 'Abda is portrayed as Rabi'a's companion. When the other women of Khalil's house inquire about Rabi'a's nightly

sojourns, 'Abda replies, "She is conversing with her beloved." The women think that Rabi'a has found another lover and inform Khalil that she is cheating on him. Khalil finds Rabi'a praying and reciting the poem related by Muhasibi, in which she says: "Night has come, the darkness has mingled, and every lover is left alone with his beloved. Now I am alone with you, my Beloved." Hearing this, Khalil strikes her and tries to force her to dance and sing, but she continues to pray. He then tries to force her to drink alcohol, but she refuses again. Finally, Khalil lashes her with a whip. The other women of the house take their revenge on Rabi'a by humiliating her and forcing her to do menial tasks like Cinderella. A woman named Dalal (an Arabic word meaning "spoiled" or "indulgent") is particularly jealous of her. When Rabi'a tries to pray, Dalal releases poisonous snakes and scorpions, but Rabi'a is undeterred. She continues to pray and asks God for a miracle.

While Khalil of Al 'Atik is sleeping with Dalal, a voice comes to him and tells him to release Rabi'a from her captivity. Upon awakening, he still hears the voice and recalls Rabi'a's endurance of his abuse. At this point the plot of the film returns to 'Attar's narrative. A servant comes and informs Khalil that a light is hanging in the air and illuminating Rabi'a's room as she prays. When Khalil goes to see this miracle for himself, the soundtrack of the movie plays Umm Kulthum singing the Poem of the Two Loves. Khalil leaves the room, crying. Later he asks Rabi'a to forgive him and confesses his love for her. He says, "If you were to fall in love with a human being I would kill him. But because it is God, you are free to go or stay in my home and worship as you wish." Rabi'a decides to leave.

At this point, the film turns to Widad El Sakkakini's version of Rabi'a's *vita*. After leaving Khalil's house, Rabi'a does not turn to a religious life but makes a living as a musician playing the lute. Differing from both 'Attar and Margaret Smith, Qurra'a accepts 'Attar's contention that Rabi'a was a musician but interprets the term *mutribi* in Persian (*mutriba* in Arabic) to mean that she played the lute. People come from all around to hear Rabi'a's music. 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd comes to see her as well and asks to marry her. However, he is a religious extremist and berates Rabi'a for her lute playing. He breaks all of her musical instruments and throws her out into the street. Once again, the Sufi Thawban (Dhu'l-Nun) appears in order to save her. He takes her back to the village to live with the old woman who raised her in her youth. However, the villagers accuse Thawban and Rabi'a of having sexual relations. They chase Rabi'a into the street and try to stone Thawban as a libertine. But because Thawban is a saint, the people trying to stone him become paralyzed and repent of their suspicions.

At this point in the film, Rabi'a's miracles begin to appear and people flock to see her as they used to do for her singing, dancing, and lute playing. Khalil of Al 'Atik, who has been driven mad by his love for Rabi'a, dies of a broken heart. The film now portrays Rabi'a's life of piety and focuses on the tropes of Rabi'a the Ascetic and Rabi'a the Teacher. The beautiful courtesan of yesterday has now become the famous Sufi of myth. She attracts the attention of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid, who seeks her wisdom and asks her to pray for his victory in a war against the Romans (i.e., the Byzantines). By this time, Rabi'a is an old woman and when Harun returns victorious from the war she is at the point of death. She is happy at the prospect of finally meeting her divine Beloved. The Sufi Thawban and her loyal friend 'Abda are by her side as she dies and a flame, representing her love, burns beside her. When she dies, the ghost of a young woman emerges from her body as Umm Kulthum sings in the background. Now

surrounded by Houris instead of singing-girls, she rises up to Heaven. After this, her spirit returns and informs her friends that she has fulfilled God's promise. The film ends with Thawban and 'Abda smiling.

Although neither film about Rabi'a merits consideration for an academy award, the production quality of the color film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* appears to have been superior to that of the black-and-white film *Shahidat al-hubb al-ilahi*. Overall, it has a much richer and compelling story line, despite the fact that Saniya Qurra'a took liberties with chronology and the narratives about Rabi'a's life. However, as Roland Barthes and Mircea Eliade both observe, in the realm of cinematic myth, accuracy is not a major consideration. When a film is made about a book or a group of narratives, the film becomes the eye of the text. As Barthes observes, neither reality nor an original text can "contaminate" the verisimilitude of a film. This is because the public, who seldom read the original work, see the work through the film. For the average film viewer in Egypt, Turkey, Malaysia, or Indonesia where the film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* has been most popular, who would not prefer to imagine Rabi'a as the beautiful Nabila Ebeid? Who cares that Saniya Qurra'a's screenplay is not historically accurate? All that matters is the verisimilitude imparted by the magic of the film. As William Shakespeare states in *Hamlet*, "The play's the thing."

III. POSTSCRIPT: RABI'A, THE PHANTOM OF THE MINISERIES

In 1996, a television miniseries aired in Egypt under the title, *Rabi'a ta'ud* (Rabi'a Returns). The screenplay for the miniseries was written by Yousry El Guindi (b. 1942), a well-known Egyptian playwright and a former official in the Ministry of Culture who had previously written a radio play called *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* in 1980.[113] Although the title of El Guindi's miniseries is *Rabi'a Returns*, its story line is not so much about Rabi'a the person, whether historical or legendary, as it is about Rabi'a the Icon. The main character is not Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya but a girl named Badr, who grows up in the region of Basra around the time of Rabi'a's death. The actress who played Badr was Iman El Toukhy (b. 1957), an actress and singer whose career spanned the years 1982-2003. According to rumors that appeared after the Egyptian revolution of 2011, she secretly married former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and bore him a daughter.[114] The actress who played Rabi'a was Samiha Ayoub (b. 1930), a famous Egyptian actress whose career covers more than five decades.[115]

The life of the main character, Badr in the miniseries draws heavily from medieval accounts of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and the modern representations of 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi and Saniya Qurra'a. For example, Badr is orphaned during a famine, which is a trope that goes back to 'Attar's *vita* of Rabi'a. Like Rabi'a in Qurra'a's screenplay, an old beggar cares for Badr as a child; however, this time the beggar is male instead of female. As a young girl, Badr sees Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in person and is fascinated by her. She watches Rabi'a secretly through the window of her house and follows her to the dwelling in which she performs her devotions. In the

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[113] For information on Yousry El Guindi, see the Arabic Wikipedia site, ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/yusri al-jundi.

[114] See the web site, ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/iman al-tukhi (in Arabic).

[115] In Egypt, Samiha Ayoub is called *Sayyidat al-Masrah*, "Lady of the Theater." See ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samiha 'Ayub (in Arabic)

miniseries, Rabi'a is cared for by another elderly woman named Shawla, who recalls Ibn al-Jawzi's character, 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal. The miniseries also depicts Rabi'a as teaching both male and female disciples. After Rabi'a dies and Badr grows up, her life begins to follow the pattern of Rabi'a's life, as depicted in Qurra'a's screenplay for the film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*. At moments of crisis, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya appears like a phantom to Badr from beyond the grave, informing her of future events and giving her moral and spiritual advice. This explains the title of the miniseries, *Rabi'a Returns*.

It is not necessary to detail the entire plot outline of this miniseries because despite some differences, it follows the narratives of Badawi and the script of the film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* quite closely, except that the main character is not Rabi'a but Badr. In the miniseries, Badr falls into a life of sensual dissipation, as Rabi'a does in both the film and in Badawi's narrative. In addition, Badr's personality is characterized by restlessness and anxiety (*qalaq*), which were key tropes in Badawi's book. *Rabi'a Returns* is important as a postscript to this chapter because it clearly exemplifies the relationship of narrative to myth described in the theories of Roland Barthes and Aleksei Losev. In Chapter 5, I noted that for Barthes, myth is the expression of "what goes without saying," in a historical narrative. For him, myth is a type of meta-discourse, in which meaning derives from a literary image.[116] The very premise of the miniseries *Rabi'a Returns* is the idea that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is a mythical meta-discourse of the type described by Barthes. This is why she is depicted cinematically as a phantom or apparition that returns periodically to remind the viewer that the narrative of Badr's story is based on Rabi'a's example. At more than one point in the series, Rabi'a even calls Badr "Rabi'a."

As the visual expression of a meta-discourse, *Rabi'a Returns* also illustrates Losev's phenomenological theory of myth, in which myth "is not the substantial, but an *energistic* self-affirmation of a person. It is the assertion of a person not in her deepest and ultimate root, but in her *manifestational* and *expressive* functions."[117] In the miniseries, the phantom Rabi'a that appears to Badr is nothing if not the *energistic and expressive manifestation* of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as a personalized image. For the screenwriter El Guindi, Rabi'a the Apparition represents the outward aspect of the mythologized Rabi'a of memory. To use Losev's terminology once again, one could even say that the mythical figure of Rabi'a as envisaged by El Guindi is a "pictorial emanation," or the idealized expression of a mythical figure as the personified incarnation of her teachings.

To return to the title of this chapter and Chapter 5, the Rabi'a who returns repeatedly in the miniseries is an *icon*. She not only manifests herself on screen as *visage, form,* and *image* but she also manifests herself as the *outline* for the life-story of the character of Badr. Each of these terms respresents a key concept in Losev's theory of myth. Through Badr's eyes and Badr's story, the viewer participates with the main character in "seeing" the image of Rabi'a the Icon as a selection of tropes, taken from a variety of premodern and modern narratives. As Widad El Sakkakini states in her book *The Sufi Lover*, on screen the viewer looks at the icon of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, "as if through eternity, or at the door of the infinite. In her right hand, she is holding

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[116] See Barthes, *Mythologies*, 11 and 131. However, to be completely accurate, for Barthes the relationship between meaning and image is the other way around: the meaning does not derive from the image; rather, meaning is *transformed into* the image. In the statement above, I interpret Barthes through Losev.

[117] Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, 93

a thick book of pages without blemish, the first of which she is about to turn. She goes over it contemplatively and tenderly."[118]

And the story continues . . .

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[118] El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 9; *al-'Ashiqa al-mutasawwifa*, 10

CONCLUSION

REVISITING THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PROBLEM:

WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT RABI'A'S LIFE AND LEGACY?

Almost twenty years ago, Denise A. Spellberg published an important work of Islamic Studies titled, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of 'A'isha Bint Abi Bakr* (1994). This work is not so much a biography as a study of 'A'isha's legacy through the issues that have been raised by her treatment in Islamic history. Chapter topics include the shaping of 'A'isha's historical persona, her role in early communal debates between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, the role of gender in debates about her political leadership, and the use of her historical persona in the shaping of the Islamic feminine ideal. Spellberg's book was one of my inspirations for writing about Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Part of my inspiration came from our shared experiences in approaching our chosen subjects. First, it took Spellberg ten years to write her book; the present work took almost ten years to produce as well. Second, both of us shared the experience of trying to write about "a difficult woman."[1] 'A'isha was a difficult woman to write about because she was a politically polarizing figure; Rabi'a is difficult to write about because her identity is expressed through multiple and sometimes very different personas. How, for instance, can one reconcile the no-nonsense and rigorous moralist and spiritual master depicted by Sulami with the existentialist rebel depicted by Badawi and El Sakkakini or the romantic lover depicted by the movie *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya* and Western New Age enthusiasts?

For Spellberg, the main historiographical problem was to choose between 'A'isha's life or legacy as the focus of study: "A life and a legacy are not always the same. Time and perspective collude to shape the latter, promoting a definitive semblance of the former. Yet of any life, the legacy is only a semblance— a vision of reality generated by those who thought and wrote about their subject, for their own reasons, after the life to be told has ended."[2] However, one cannot pose this problem in exactly the same way for the study of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Because 'A'isha was the Prophet Muhammad's wife and an important political figure after the Prophet's death, there is much more information on her life than on the life of Rabi'a. As Spellberg's book makes clear, the historical 'A'isha appears in chronicles, she is a major protagonist in the Prophet Muhammad's biography, she is a figure of political contention between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, and she is even referred to in the Qur'an, albeit by way of allusion. None of these resources is available for the study of the historical Rabi'a. Although both 'A'isha and Rabi'a as they are known today are the products of literary representation, 'A'isha is primarily thought of as a historical figure; with Rabi'a however, the question of her historicity is still open. Because 'A'isha is a historical personage, Spellberg could speak about "the power of interpretation in historical meaning."[3] Her book is clearly part of historical literature and a glance

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[1] Spellberg, *Poliics, Gender, and the Islamic Past,* ix

[2] Ibid, 1

[3] Ibid; technically speaking, Spellberg's use of the term "interpretation" is a misnomer. Instead, she should have spoken about "the power of *representation* in historical meaning." Her book is not about textual

at the bibliography reveals that the theoretical works she consulted were mostly works of historiography or feminist studies. Only a few sources were literary studies.

For Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya the situation is the opposite. In Rabi'a's case, her legacy is not the semblance of her life, as with 'A'isha. Instead, it is more accurate to say that Rabi'a's life (i.e., her *vita* as presented through literature) is a semblance of her legacy. Although Rabi'a is a major figure of Islamic and modern secular literature, she is not so clearly a figure of history. No extant source from her lifetime mentions her and the provenance of the eyewitness accounts that exist in later works is still in doubt. Thus, these accounts do not fully measure up to Jan Vansina's standards for oral tradition as history. One of my most persistent desires since starting this study has been to find a manuscript of the lost ninth-century work *Kitab al-ruhban* by Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Burjulani. Because this text was composed no more than fifty years after Rabi'a's death, it would tell us much about the historicity of Rabi'a and how far back we could trace the tropological construction of her narrative. If Burjulani did not mention Rabi'a at all, it would at the very least cast doubt on her reputation; if he did mention her, his accounts would provide a touchstone from which to assess later accounts and depictions.

The persistence of these historiographical problems is why I chose to title this work *Rabi'a from Narrative to Myth*. To the extent that it is a work of history, it is primarily a work of literary history. Unlike Spellberg with 'A'isha bint Abi Bakr, I did not have the advantage of being able to consult historical accounts of the life of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Instead, as I explained in the Introduction, I had to approach the literary sources that were available to me pragmatically and with an open mind, and tried to select the theoretical tools that were best suited for the job at hand. Sometimes the best tools for the job came from the field of literary theory. This explains my reliance on Roland Barthes, for example. When I turned to historiography, the most relevant theorists often were those who drew on literary theory for their ideas. Such theorists included Hayden White and F. R. Ankersmit. At other times and for other needs, I was able to rely on historiographers influenced by anthropology or the *Annales* tradition of social history, such as Jan Vansina and Thomas Heffernan. At times, I had to draw concepts from fields as distant from Islamic Studies as Communications studies, Ethnomethodology, and Conversation Analysis. Finally, if I had not discovered the Russian phenomenologist Aleksei Fyodorovich Losev's work, *The Dialectics of Myth*, I would never have thought of depicting Rabi'a as both a myth and an icon. Surprisingly, what have been least helpful theoretically are works from my own field of Religious Studies. As I also explained in the Introduction, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is not a normal subject of religious or Islamic studies, just as she is not a normal subject of history. Strictly speaking, one cannot talk about Rabi'a's theology or philosophy; one can only talk about the theology or philosophy of those who wrote about her.

Therefore, to make this study an acceptable work of history, I had to approach historiographically the literature in which Rabi'a appears. Because I could not fill in the details of Rabi'a the historical person, I traced the development of the *representation* of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya from narrative to master narrative and myth, focusing on the narrative tropes that

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hermeneutics (the realm of interpretation), but about the conflicting *representations* of 'A'isha in Islamic literature. For F. R. Ankersmit, whom I follow in the use of these terms, interpretation is equivalent to the *explanation* of a historical object; with representation, the reality of the object is transferred from the outside to the text itself. Hence, the representations of 'A'isha discussed by Spellberg "re-present" her from various perspectives. See Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference*, 54-63.

comprise her identity.   First, I identified four key narrative tropes (these were master narratives in themselves) that defined her identity in premodern Sufi literature. These tropes were Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, Rabi'a the Lover, and Rabi'a the Sufi. Eventually, it became necessary to add the trope of Rabi'a the Icon to this list in order to account for the transposition of the Rabi'a narratives in the modern period into new genres of representation. These genres included scholarly studies, novels and novellas, songs, radio plays, movies, and a television mini-series. Because of the transposition of the Rabi'a narratives into these new genres, the figure of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is now the subject of both religious and secular representations.

   Although the details of Rabi'a's representation differ widely, certain constants remain. First, the four main tropes of the premodern Sufi narratives are still relevant, although the trope of Rabi'a the Lover now takes pride of place. In addition, another constant of representation has remained since the premodern period. This is the depiction, which first appears in the works of Ibn al-Jawzi and 'Attar at the end of the twelfth century, of Rabi'a as a figural image, like the subject of a portrait or a painting. One can see this aspect of the "reality effect" at work in the description of Rabi'a by the modern writer Widad El Sakkakini. "I see Rabi'a's faint image on the shimmering waves: not in worn-out dress and sandals, with a stick; but moving towards the shores of heaven in a halo of brightness, with a reed pipe, playing the tune for her verses."[4] Because of the prevalence of such visual images, especially in the modern period, I called the fifth major trope of the Rabi'a narratives, "Rabi'a the Icon." The icon is an appropriate metaphor for Rabi'a as a "mythicized historical figure" (to use Mircea Eliade's term) because the name, "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya," that is attached to this figure is pregnant with multiple narrative associations, just as a painted icon evokes a variety of stories that are associated with a single image.[5]

   I have tried to avoid philosophical discussions in this work as much as possible for two reasons. First, discussing all of the questions that this study raises would take this work far beyond anything manageable. For practical reasons, these discussions are best left for future conference papers or articles. Second, I felt that with the proliferation of writings today that treat the Rabi'a narratives as historical realities or empirical facts, it was important to set the record straight and separate empirical data from representation as far as possible. This is why I devoted so much of this study to what I called in Chapter 1 the "archaeology of cultural memory." I hope that after reading this work, no serious student of Sufism would be able to say, "Rabi'a said this" or Rabi'a did that," or speak about her as the "founder of Islamic Love mysticism," or talk about "the contribution of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya to Sufism," without qualification. Although I am very open to the use of literary approaches when appropriate in Islamic and historical studies, I also believe in relying on empirical approaches to history whenever it is possible to do so. To take a famous quote of the philosopher Wittgenstein out of context, too often in the field of Sufi Studies, "language goes on holiday" and creates a pseudo-history because its practitioners are inattentive to the nature of the sources that they are dealing with.[6] People who speak or write about Rabi'a in this way are not talking about "principial truth" in the way that the French Traditionalist writer Jean Annestay does (see Chapter 5). Instead, they are speaking of historical reality in the way a historian does, and as such, they should hold themselves accountable to the standards of the

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[4] El Sakkakini, *First among Sufis*, 62; *al-'Ashiqa al-Mutasawwifa*, 98.

[5] See Introduction and Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 39-40.

[6] Ankersmit, *Historical Representation*, 30

discipline of history. To the extent that this study helps promote such an objective, this alone would make it a useful contribution to the field of Islamic Studies.

I. What Can We Say About The Historical Rabi'a Al-'Adawiyya?

In strictly empirical terms, "Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya" is a proper name attached to a number of narrative substances.[7] As such, she refers only vaguely to a real substance or empirical reality beyond the level of narrative. To use the terminology of the philosopher of history Frank R. Ankersmit, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is a proper name "of views or representations of the past," or "of a common denominator to be discerned in a number of roughly comparable representations."[8] That is to say, when we examine the figure of Rabi'a historically, we do not examine historical reality per se, but *the historical reality of narrative representations*.

According to Ankersmit, the student of history must be careful to distinguish three levels of historical reality: (1) the past itself; (2) the empirical description of the past; and (3) the representation of the past.[9] With respect to the study of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, the "real" or historical Rabi'a (i.e., the Rabi'a that lies beyond the level of narrative) would stand for "the past itself." The first-hand accounts and descriptions of Rabi'a that can be found in some of the earliest sources would be roughly equivalent to "the empirical description of the past." As for "representations of the past," these would include all literary and historical representations of Rabi'a that make a claim of truth, whether they are "principial," empirical-historical, figural, or symbolic. The advantage of Ankersmit's three-part model of historical reality is that it allows us to clarify the concept of historical representation without denying the importance of empirical data and without necessarily privileging the historical meaning of narratives over their "principial" or religious meaning.[10]

According to Ankersmit's model, an empirical historical study of the "real" Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya would have to limit its focus of investigation to levels 1 and 2— the level of the past itself and the level of empirical descriptions of the past. In the present work, these levels of historical reality comprise the bases of Chapter 1, "Rabi'a the Teacher," and Chapter 2, "Rabi'a the Ascetic." One could also consider the discussion of Rabi'a's celibacy in Chapter 3 as part of such an empirical study as well. Although Chapter 4, "Rabi'a the Sufi," is one of the so-called "historical" chapters of this work, no extant source prior to the tenth century CE describes Rabi'a as a Sufi. Thus, from a strictly empirical perspective, we cannot call her a "Sufi" per se. To address this problem historically, Chapter 4 sets up a "What if?" scenario based on the empirical descriptions of other ascetics who were called "Sufis" in the earliest sources. In other words, if some newfound ninth-century work were discovered that describes Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as a Sufi, she most likely would fit the descriptions of the "Sufis" (I call them "Proto-Sufis") discussed in Chapter 4.

Because she is mentioned in three early sources (Muhasibi, Jahiz, and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur) dating to no more than 75 years after her death, we can conclude on the basis of inductive

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[7] This definition follows F. R. Ankersmit in Ibid, 57.

[8] Ibid

[9] Ibid

[10] This is a somewhat wider view of representational reality than that advocated by Ankersmit. For Ankersmit, the level of representation is restricted to historical representation only.

reasoning that a woman called Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya or Rabi'a al-Qaysiyya lived in the region of Basra in the eighth century CE. From her name, we know that she belonged to the clan of 'Adi ibn Qays of the tribe of Qays Aylan of the North Arabian Mudar Arabs. As discussed in Chapter 1, we can also conclude from the accounts reported by Jahiz and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur that she was a highly respected and prominent member of her clan. This makes it unlikely that she was a non-Arab of convert origins (*mawlat*), who was adopted into the clan of 'Adi ibn Qays as a servant or client. Significantly, the accounts that make Rabi'a a *mawlat* first appear in the works of writers of Persian cultural origin, such as Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami. Because of her high status in her clan, it is even less likely that Rabi'a was a slave, as Farid al-Din al-'Attar claimed. The *hurra*, the free Arab woman of respected status, was an important figure in the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods. These free women (*hara'ir*) played major roles in early Islamic society, including transmitting Hadith and teaching both men and women.[11] All of the earliest accounts of Rabi'a concur in putting her in this role.

The works of Jahiz and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur are important sources of information on Rabi'a because these writers were not from the ascetic or Sufi traditions. Their interest in her was only as a literary or rhetorical example. Jahiz in particular appears to have derived some of his information from local memory or oral traditions. Although he himself could not give an empirical description of Rabi'a, he was in a position to know people who could have done so. The provenance of Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's sources is less clear. It is possible that he took some of his information from early prosopographical works such as Burjulani's *Kitab al-ruhban* and he may even have taken an account or two from Jahiz. However, his status as a disinterested observer of Rabi'a's legacy and his relative closeness to her in time and place meant that he too was most likely a recipient of traditions that originated from people who knew people who knew her.

From Jahiz we learn that Rabi'a was a mainstream or "Sunni" Muslim. He calls her a renunciant (*mutazahhida*) and an ascetic ritualist (*mutanassika*), and states that she had some type of leadership role (*riyasa*) in ascetic groups. From an aphorism in Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's *Balaghat al-nisa'*, we understand that Rabi'a's asceticism was a vocation that was based on strict adherence to divine commandments. She also followed a strict moral code but according to Jahiz, she did not have a reputation for extremism. Overall, she was best known in the generations after her death for her wisdom and eloquence. This is indicated by Jahiz's nomination of Rabi'a as "one of the people of *bayan* (*min ahl al-bayan*). This category included preachers, poets, sages, political leaders, teachers, and a small number of people that he referred to as "Sufis." A person of *bayan* was someone who could articulate important concepts and make them accessible to those with less eloquence or learning. I argued in Chapter 1 that Jahiz's concept of *bayan* was a key element in the trope of Rabi'a the Teacher. I also argued that this trope shares much in common with the Stoic concept of the sage, who is both a master of the "Truth," which is discovered through demonstration and argument, and a master of the "True," which consists of the immediate knowledge of "that which is." These qualities come very close to the qualities of a person of *bayan*. Although Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur does not use this term, in general he agrees with

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[11] On the social roles of *hara'ir*, besides the works cited in Chapter 1, see "The Rise and Fall of Women of Knowledge," in Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Sa'd to* Who's Who (Boulder, Colorado and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 65-71.

Jahiz's assessment of Rabi'a by calling her one of the "women of authoritative opinion" (*dhawwat al-ra'y*).

Given this endorsement of the historical Rabi'a's reputation, it is natural to expect that she would have had followers or students. Here the question of empirical description becomes more problematical. While the sources mention several of Rabi's associates, these mostly come from later works, starting with Sufi *tabaqat* texts in the eleventh century CE. These sources date to nearly 300 years after Rabi'a's death. Although some of Rabi'a's alleged associates are cited as sources of traditions about her in these works, we cannot be sure of their accuracy until they are corroborated by earlier works dating to the tenth— or even better— the ninth century CE. This is because the names of the most prominent of these individuals were used at times to validate unattributed accounts about Rabi'a. Unfortunately, the early works that could corroborate these sources all appear to be lost.

A key name that associates Rabi'a with important male religious figures of the eighth century CE is Ja'far ibn Sulayman al-Dab'i (d. 794-5 CE). It is under his name, for example, that Sulami traces the claim that Rabi'a knew the famous juridical scholar and Qur'an commentator Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 778 CE). Another name that is used to validate later reports is Shu'ba ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 781-2 CE), who, like Dab'i, claimed to have visited Rabi'a in the company of Sufyan al-Thawri. Along with Thawri himself, these individuals provide some of the most important allegedly first-hand accounts of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and her teachings. Although the narrative tradition is virtually unanimous in claiming that Sufyan al-Thawri was Rabi'a's student or associate, it is difficult to assess the veracity of this assertion in empirical terms. Dab'i, Thawri, and Shu'ba all support each other but who supports them? As it stands today, we lack outside corroboration for this circle of alleged associates. Once again, it would be very helpful to find one or more of the lost early sources that could provide such corroboration.

Based on information on Sufyan al-Thawri's life that is available from other historical sources, I concluded in Chapter 1 that he could have associated with Rabi'a only between the years 775-778 CE, when he resided in Basra at the end of his life. However, did Thawri actually know Rabi'a? It is just as possible to speculate that eleventh-century Sufi hagiographers such as Sulami and Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani (d. 1038-9 CE) used the name of Sufyan al-Thawri to add luster to Rabi'a's reputation, as it is to conclude that the first-hand accounts transmitted in his name are true. Although the former scenario is probably less likely than the latter, it remains theoretically possible that the accounts of Thawri's encounters with Rabi'a are no more than a medieval Islamic version of the game of "Six Degrees of Separation."

Whatever their status as empirical descriptions may be, the accounts of Rabi'a and Sufyan al-Thawri provided by Sulami and other Sufi writers conform in general to the image of Rabi'a portrayed by the more empirically reliable accounts of Jahiz and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur. They also do not contradict the ninth-century citation of Rabi'a by the Sufi Muhasibi or the accounts and descriptions taken by Sulami, Isfahani, and others from Burjulani's *Kitab al-ruhban* and other early prosopographical works. According to Sulami, Sufyan al-Thawri referred to Rabi'a as his *mu'addiba*— his teacher, trainer, or molder of character. As explained in Chapter 1, the early Islamic pedagogy of character formation (*ta'dib*) shared much in common with Jahiz's concept of *bayan*. A teacher of character like Rabi'a would have used the technique of *bayan* to help establish good qualities of mind and soul in her students. The concept of *bayan* was also related to the concept of culture (*adab*) in this period. The Arab notion of culture that prevailed

in the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods differed significantly from the more culturally Persian and courtly notion of culture by which *adab* was known in the middle Abbasid period. In Rabi'a's day, character formation was primarily associated with the virtues of *muruwwa*, "manly" or mature comportment, and *hilm*, rational judgment derived from reason and experience. The image of Rabi'a that emerges from the earliest sources embodies all three of these character traits: *adab, hilm,* and *bayan.* This is why I concluded Chapter 1 by stating that based on the earliest sources, one could say that the content of Rabi'a's teachings (*ta'dib*) provided an early example of what Sufis would later refer to as the spiritual way (*al-tariqa*).

The earliest sources also concur in describing Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as an ascetic. In Chapter 2, I framed my discussion of the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic in terms of the "World/Nonworld Dichotomy," a construct developed by the Belgian anthropologist Jacques Maquet. According to this construct, the Nonworld is an alternate worldview that is seen as a form of liberation from economic and social concerns and from worldly values. This model of the ascetic worldview is useful for the study of the ascetics of early Islam because it portrays them as part of an ascetic counterculture. Maquet's view of ascetic communities as a type of counterculture corresponds closely to Marshall G. S. Hodgson's notion of the "Piety-Minded" as a counterculture in early Islamic society, as described in the first volume of his work, *The Venture of Islam.*[12]

I devoted a major part of Chapter 2 to a discussion of the doctrines and practices that the historical Rabi'a might have followed as an early Muslim ascetic. This included an examination of the key terms of early Islamic asceticism. Three categories of ascetic practice were particularly important to the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic. These are *zuhd* (renunciation, or asceticism in general), *wara'* (moral or ethical precaution), and *nusk* (ascetic ritualism, which includes extreme ritualistic behaviors and the practice of asceticism as a vocation). Although the term *faqir* ("poor one") has long been a synonym for the term *Sufi*, the intentional cultivation of poverty (*faqr*) does not seem to have been as important for early Islam as it was for early Christianity. I argued in Chapter 2 that in early Islamic asceticism moderation was the normal rule, just as it was for Islam in general. For early Muslim ascetics, patience and perseverance were more important than poverty per se.

A key element of the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic is a set of practices that I call *essential asceticism*. This term, which came originally from the scholar of Jewish asceticism Eliezer Diamond, distinguishes the ascetic practices attributed to Rabi'a and some of her alleged colleagues from the more common form of asceticism in this period, which I termed *instrumental asceticism*. Instrumental asceticism was exemplified in Rabi'a's time by the *nasik* or ascetic ritualist. Ascetic ritualists practiced their asceticism in the pursuit of instrumental goals, such as attainment to heaven or other tokens of divine favor. At times, these practices aroused the attention of outside observers and in some cases, ascetic ritualists even acted in ways that were analogous to the behaviors of performance artists. A third type of asceticism in Rabi'a's time was *reactionary asceticism*. As its name implies, this type of asceticism was a ritualized act of protest against the unequal distribution of wealth in the Abbasid Empire. In contrast to the practitioners of instrumental and reactionary asceticism, the practitioners of essential asceticism viewed their asceticism as a natural consequence of their devotion to God. In other words, their

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[12] See Chapter 1 of Book Two, "The Islamic Opposition," in Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, volume 1, 241-279.

asceticism was a way of life that required neither dramatic behaviors nor instrumental goals for its performance. With respect to the trope of Rabi'a the Ascetic, the early sources, whether Sufi or otherwise, more often depict Rabi'a as an essential ascetic than as an instrumental ascetic.

Building on research first conducted for my book *Early Sufi Women* (1999), I argued in Chapter 2 that the historical Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was not the founder, but the most famous representative of a tradition of women's asceticism in Basra that went back more than a century before her. The origins of this tradition can be traced to the Prophet Muhammad's widow 'A'isha bint Abi Bakr (d. 678 CE), who lived in Basra for a while and was known for asceticism at the end of her life. The actual founder of this tradition was Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya (d. 702 CE), a historically well-documented member of Rabi'a's clan who was a companion of 'A'isha. For the most part, Mu'adha was an instrumental ascetic, although she seems to have introduced the practice of worshipful servitude (*ta'abbud*) that the Sufi hagiographer Sulami attributed to Sufi women in general. Mu'adha's disciples were mostly instrumental ascetics as well. For example, Ghufayra al-'Abida (d. ca. 720 CE) was a ritualistic weeper (*bakiya*): she wept because she feared that her balance sheet of virtues would come up short on the Day of Judgment. However, the women ascetics whose names are associated with Rabi'a were different in that they practiced essential asceticism. For example, Maryam of Basra (d. before 801 CE) advocated a doctrine of Love similar to that ascribed to Rabi'a. This was also the case for Hayyuna of al-Ubulla (d. ca. 750 CE). The early medieval culture critic Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Nisaburi (d. 1016 CE) identifies Hayyuna as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's teacher in his book *'Uqala' al-majanin* (The Rationally Insane). A major argument of Chapter 3 was that the Love mysticism attributed to Rabi'a and other ascetics of Basra— male and female alike— developed out of the practice of essential asceticism. Because the practice of essential asceticism is more an approach to God than a rejection of the world, it leads to the goal of union with God that is a fundamental concept of Love mysticism.

Although in his Book of Sufi Women, Sulami mentions ten women ascetics who were contemporaries of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in Basra, only one of them, Maryam of Basra, is identified as Rabi'a's companion. However, this is not a well-attested attribution. There is only one chain of transmission (*isnad*) for this account, and its initial source is Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari (d. 845 CE), an early Sufi who lived first in Basra and later in Syria (see Chapters 2 and 4). Ibn Abi al-Hawari was the husband of Rabi'a bint Isma'il of Damascus (d. before 845 CE), who is often confused with Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya in Sufi and popular literature. Sulami claims that Maryam of Basra was a contemporary of Rabi'a and survived her. Although this is possible, we cannot be sure of this claim. For example, Sulami mistakenly believed that Mu'adha al-'Adawiyya was a contemporary and close associate of Rabi'a too, even though she lived a full century before her.[13]

'Abda bint Abi Shawwal was another possible companion of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Although her name appears as an important source on Rabi'a in Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa*, she is not mentioned in Sulami's Book of Sufi Women. 'Abda is said to have been Rabi'a's servant in the final years of her life. She is important to the Rabi'a narratives as the source of accounts of dream visions of Rabi'a. Just as with Maryam of Basra, the main source on 'Abda is the male

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[13] Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 88-89; the Arabic phrase that Sulami uses is, *Kanat min aqran Rabi'a wa kanat ta'anasa bi-ha*, which literally means, "[Mu'adha] was a contemporary of Rabi'a and was intimate (i.e., very close) with her."

Sufi Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari. Although I state in Chapter 2 that Ibn Abi al-Hawari and his teacher, Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d. 830 CE), may have constituted an important link between the early Sufis of Basra and Syria, this does not help to establish the authenticity of the accounts about the alleged companions of Rabi'a. Although we can establish with a fairly high degree of certainty that there were a number of notable women ascetics in and around Basra during the historical Rabi'a's lifetime, we cannot be sure how many, if any of them, were her companions or associates.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the question of celibacy in the Rabi'a narratives. Although some later writers have claimed that Rabi'a was married, she is identified as a celibate in Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur's ninth-century work, *Balaghat al-nisa'*. Once again, because Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur was an outsider to the tradition represented by Rabi'a and the other ascetics of her time, we can take this assertion as an empirical description of general knowledge. Unlike in the Islamic world today, in Rabi'a's day celibacy was a common ascetic discipline. To better understand this phenomenon, I divided the practice of celibacy into two varieties: *principled* and *vocational*. Principled celibacy is a form of celibacy that is based on scriptural foundations and is seen as integral to ascetic practice in general. This type of celibacy is practiced in Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity. By contrast, vocational celibacy is based on individual choice. The vocational celibate views marriage and children as impediments to her principal vocation, which is service to God. This type of celibacy was more characteristic of early Islam and rabbinic Judaism. In the context of early Islam, it was one of the hallmarks of essential asceticism. In the practice of essential asceticism, there is no place for marriage because the soul is completely preoccupied with God.

As for an empirical consideration of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's Sufism, one must start by asking the question, "What was a 'Sufi' in Rabi'a's time?" This is because the picture of early Sufism known today is largely the result of later Sufi writers anachronistically projecting their definitions of Sufism back onto earlier periods. Therefore, in order to address the issue of the historical Rabi'a's Sufism and avoid further anachronism, in Chapter 4, I examined early empirical descriptions of people who were known as "Sufis" in her time. To do this, I consulted the writings of Jahiz, Muhasibi, and Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani's *Hilyat al-awliya'* (The Adornment of the Saints). Although this latter work dates to the eleventh century CE, it contains many accounts from the earliest writers on the ascetic and Sufi traditions in Islam, such as Burjulani and Abu Sa'id ibn al-A'rabi (d. 952-3).

Based on the information derived from these sources, I concluded that the term "Sufi" in Rabi'a's time denoted a spiritual method that included six specific attitudes and practices. I referred to this spiritual method as "Proto-Sufism," because Sufism as a clearly defined institution in Islam had not yet developed. The main tenets of Proto-Sufism are the following: (1) A worldview governed by the World/Nonworld dichotomy; (2) the pursuit of both outward and inward purity; (3) outwardly visible acts of ascetic ritualism; (4) an approach to social relations that was characterized by ascetic precaution (*wara'*) and ethical training (*ta'dib*); (5) a critical view of ordinary life; (6) the internalization of spirituality through the practice of essential asceticism and/or Love mysticism. The most important difference between the Proto-Sufism of Rabi'a's time and the Sufism of later periods was that whereas later versions of Sufism focused on theological concepts, Proto-Sufism was conceptualized almost entirely in terms of practice. This indicates that the pragmatic and practical approach to spirituality that Sulami identified as a

characteristic of women's spirituality may have been due more to the Proto-Sufism of the women ascetics who appear in his Book of Sufi Women than to their gender.

It is also important to address from an empirical perspective the question of whether Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was really a Love mystic. Since the time of the early systematizers of Sufism in the late tenth century CE, virtually everyone has agreed that Rabi'a was an important figure— perhaps the key figure— in introducing the doctrine of divine love in Islam. As I mention in Chapter 3, indirect support for this assertion can be found in the observation that a fully developed tradition of Love mysticism does not appear in accounts of ascetics before the time of Rabi'a. However, I also demonstrated that just as a tradition of women's asceticism in Basra preceded Rabi'a by 100 years, so did a spiritual tradition that focused on the love of God. This early Love tradition in Basra seems to have been associated with the North Arabian clan of Banu 'Abd Qays, just as asceticism was associated with Rabi'a's clan of Banu 'Adi ibn Qays. However, this early tradition appears to have used love as a metaphor rather than practiced an actual form of Love mysticism.

With respect to empirical evidence, it is possible to conclude that the historical Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya practiced a form of essential asceticism that included expressions of divine love and intimacy. This can be seen in the earliest extant quotation of Rabi'a, which appears in al-Harith al-Muhasibi's mid-ninth-century treatise on essential asceticism, *al-Qasd wa al-ruju' ila Allah* (God as the Goal and the Return): "The night has come, the darkness has mingled, and every lover is left alone with his beloved. Now I am alone with you, my Beloved."[14] Since Muhasibi wrote this work less than fifty years after Rabi'a's death, it provides important circumstantial evidence that the "real" Rabi'a was known for some type of Love doctrine. In addition, a Love doctrine associated with other women ascetics appears to have been centered on the Iraqi port town of al-Ubulla in Rabi'a's time. Three women ascetics of al-Ubulla who were contemporaries of Rabi'a are depicted in the sources as representatives of this doctrine. These were Sha'wana, Hayyuna, and a poet named Rayhana. As noted above, the Persian writer Nisaburi, a contemporary of Sulami, claimed that Hayyuna was Rabi'a's teacher. In Chapter 3, I discussed the possibility that the poems of Rayhana might have been the source for the apparently erroneous tradition that Rabi'a herself was a poet.

Although the quotation of Rabi'a by Muhasibi is the only direct evidence we have that Rabi'a was a Love mystic, I am not willing to reject this possibility altogether. This is because other relatively early sources contain quotations by Rabi'a on the subject of Love that corroborate Muhasibi's citation. For example, one of Rabi'a's most famous statements on Love is cited in a late tenth-century treatise on Love by Abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Daylami (d. 1001-2). In this anecdote, a person asks Rabi'a, "How is your love for the Prophet?" Rabi'a replies, "Verily, I love him. However, my love for the Creator has preoccupied me from love for created things."[15] Daylami took this story from an earlier work, *Tabaqat al-nussak* (The Generations of Ascetic Ritualists), by Abu Sa'id ibn al-A'rabi (d. 952-3). We know that Daylami copied from this work because he quotes Ibn al-A'rabi's commentary on Rabi'a's answer verbatim: "What she meant was this: I love the Messenger of God with faith, belief, and conviction because he is the

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[14] Muhasibi, *al-Qasd wa al-ruju' ila Allah*, 104

[15] Daylami, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, 112; this quote also appears in Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 78-9 Daylami appears to have taken the quotation from Abu Sa'id ibn al-A'rabi's *Tabaqat al-nussak*. On this latter work, see Chapter 1 and R. Cornell, Introduction to Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*, 53.

Messenger of God and because God loves him and has commanded us to love him. But my love for God demands preoccupation with constant remembrance of God, intimate converse with him, and constant delight in the sweetness of his speech and in his looking into men's hearts, while still remembering his blessings."[16] Unfortunately, the original of Ibn al-A'rabi's *Tabaqat al-nussak* is lost. However, this short commentary confirms that Sufis were discussing statements on Love attributed to Rabi'a as early as the first half of the tenth century CE, before Abu Talib al-Makki created the Sufi literary trope of Rabi'a the Lover.

According to F. R. Ankersmit's model of the levels of historical reality, the preceding discussion summarizes all that we can say empirically about the historical Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. This is actually a significant amount of information, considering the limited sources at our disposal. The existence of this evidence is why I concluded, despite my initial misgivings, that a real person named Rabi'a lay behind the Sufi myth. However, what we can conclude about the historical Rabi'a from empirical or even quasi-empirical evidence is only a small fraction of the information about her in non-empirical sources. For this reason, I am unable to end this work by concluding, as Denise Spellberg did for 'A'isha bint Abi Bakr, that Rabi'a's legacy is a semblance of her life. On the contrary, the most abiding reality of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is that her life as we know it today is not just a semblance, but a pastiche or imitation of her narrative legacy. As Chapters 5 and 6 of this study demonstrate, the story of her life is a myth composed out of earlier narratives, tropes, and traditions.

II. WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT RABI'A'S LEGACY?

At the beginning of Chapter 4, I criticized the historian of early Christianity Elizabeth A. Clark for using Roland Barthes' concept of the reality effect to argue that the male use of the trope of the Woman of Wisdom in early Christian hagiography says little or nothing about the "real" women behind these stories. According to Clark, this motif provided a means by which men could "think through various troubling intellectual and theological problems that confronted male theologians."[17] She argues that as a merely figural woman, the Woman of Wisdom is a "Pseudo-Other"— "an alternate male identity whose constant accessibility to men lends men fullness and totality that enables them to dispense (supposedly) with otherness altogether."[18] Although one could easily apply Clark's argument to the tropes of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya discussed in this work, I argued against her denial of the historical reality of such tropes by pointing out that she overemphasizes the dichotomy between historical writing and fiction. Following the lead of Hayden White, I argued instead that students of hagiography should not allow the ideal of objectivity to lead them into blind alleys of artificial and overly simplistic "either-or" dichotomies. The logic of hagiographical works is not "either-or" but "both-and." The use of tropes or even fictional styles of narrative in such works does not mean that their historical claims are necessarily false. For this reason, the modern historian must inquire after both the empirical and the figural "truths" of hagiographical narratives.

As we have seen in the preceding section, with respect to the tropes or master narratives of Rabi'a the Teacher, Rabi'a the Ascetic, Rabi'a the Sufi, and even Rabi'a the Lover, some

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[16] Daylami, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, 112

[17] Clark, "The Lady Vanishes," 24

[18] Ibid, 26

empirical content does in fact lie behind these representations. However, to agree with Clark at least in part, with respect to the trope of Rabi'a the Icon, what Hayden White calls "the content of the form" is more important than the empirical content of these representations. With this latter trope, it is impossible to separate the historical Rabi'a from her figural or mythical representations. Starting with Abu Talib al-Makki's construction of the trope of Rabi'a the Lover at the end of the tenth century CE, the history of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya moves out of the domain of empirical studies or even tradition and into the domain of literature. By the time Farid al-Din al-'Attar composed Rabi'a's *vita* at the beginning of the thirteenth century CE, Rabi'a's story had become to all intents and purposes a story of literary and even fictional representations. From this point onward, analytical tools developed for the study of non-historical narratives become just as useful for the study of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as analytical tools developed for the study of historical narratives. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that well before the beginning of the modern era, one could refer to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as a myth.

To return briefly to Elizabeth Clark's article, it seems to me now that my chief difference with her argument was a difference of perspective. As noted above, Clark's thesis is not wrong: I have observed many times on my own that male writers from Makki to Badawi worked through their personal issues by using Rabi'a's voice. In fact, one could argue that Badawi's portrayal of Rabi'a according to Kierkegaard's model of Aesthetic Man is an excellent example of the male use of a woman as a "pseudo-Other." However, since finishing Chapters 4 and 5 I have started to read a number of works on literary representation that come from outside the discipline of history. These works have given me a new sense of the limitations of the historical perspective when dealing with a subject of both medieval and modern hagiography like Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. For a figure like her, the term "historical," does not fit comfortably, no matter what we try to do with it. Therefore, in thinking about Rabi's legacy, I ask myself: Might it not be more appropriate to think about this legacy in "poetic" rather than in "historical" terms?

In the final chapter of the book *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975), the literature scholar Harold Bloom notes that for the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, "the trope is an error, albeit necessary and valuable."[19] This statement encapsulates my problem with Elizabeth Clark's article. Because she takes a Nietzschean approach to hagiography, she views tropes as functional but not as historically accurate. Although the function of a trope is important, there is always the sense that something is missing; this is because Clark understands the trope as standing in for something more authentic or real than itself. Thus, if the Woman of Wisdom is a trope, she cannot be a real or authentic woman. However, based on the empirical assessment of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya given above, we can conclude that this figure is *both* a trope *and* a historically authentic woman. Therefore, the most appropriate question in Rabi'a's case is not: Which picture is real? Instead, it is: Which version of Rabi'a's identity do we want to focus on? As F. R. Ankersmit points out, the romantic philosophical foundations of the historicist perspective compel us to search for the true or authentic in all narrative representations.[20] However, with characters that are both empirical and tropological such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, the question of empirical truth obscures their figural meaning. If we turned our attention more to the poetics of such representations than their historicity, we might be less inclined to see tropes as a deficiency

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[19] Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York and London: Continuum Books, 2005 reprint of 1975 first edition), 62

[20] See Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation*, 12-26.

and hence would be less limited in the insights that we could draw from them. To put it another way, tropes enrich historical representations.

Because the present study was originally conceived as a historical work, it is impossible to completely avoid the prejudice that the "true story" of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is different from the tropes in which she appears. This is why in the previous section it was necessary to summarize what we could conclude empirically about the historical Rabi'a. This is also why I felt the need to correct those who see her tropological representations as empirical. However, it is very difficult to treat an iconic figure like Rabi'a empirically without sacrificing something of her meaning in the process. Despite the extensive historical research that I have done, I remain haunted by Jean Annestay's argument about the importance of the "principial" meaning of the Rabi'a narratives. When I first read his book, *Une Femme Soufie en Islam*, I thought that his appeal to "principial" meaning was merely a means to avoid empirical rigor. However, I now realize that he makes a good point. There are many valid ways to read the story of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Hagiography is perhaps the best premodern example of Roland Barthes' famous observation about "the death of the Author."[21] Therefore, in the remainder of this Conclusion, I would like to briefly discuss Rabi'a's legacy in terms of where we might go rather than where we have been. Instead of repeating what was said in the previous chapters of this work, it seems more useful at this point to suggest new directions for future research.

In his book *Modernity At Large* (1996), the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (another person who is fond of the concept of master narratives) advocates the creation of a new field of study that he calls "the anthropology of literature" or "the anthropology of representation."[22] The creation of such a field is necessary, he says, because the terms *meaning, discourse,* and *text* have become ubiquitous in modern intellectual culture. According to Appadurai, the popularity of these literary concepts has reached the point where "the subject matter of cultural studies could roughly be taken as the relationship between the word and the world."[23] In other words, even social sciences such as anthropology have been affected by the "linguistic turn" from which these terms derive. The anthropology of literature or representation is also important, Appadurai says, because "fiction, like myth is part of the cultural repertoire of contemporary societies. Readers of novels and poems can be moved to intense action (as with *The Satanic Verses* of Salman Rushdie), and their authors often contribute to the creation of social and moral maps for their readers . . .. Prose fiction is the exemplary province of the post-Renaissance imagination, and in this regard it is central to a more general ethnography of the imagination."[24]

I do not believe that it would be out of place to claim that the present work of *Rabi'a from Narrative to Myth* is a step toward Appadurai's "ethnography of the imagination." However, one of its most important contributions to this field would be as a reminder that the relationship between the word and the world that Appadurai speaks of is not only a matter of concern for modern cultural studies. As both the present study and Harold Bloom's *Kabbalah and Criticism* demonstrate, in sacred scriptures, hagiography, and mystical narratives a semiotic relationship between the word and the world has existed for centuries. What else, after all, could

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[21] See the discussion of this concept in Graham Allen, *Intertexuality* (New York and London: Routledge, second edition, 2011), 68-74.

[22] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 58

[23] Ibid, 51

[24] Ibid, 58

it mean when the New Testament states, "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God" (John, 1:1), or when the Qur'an states, "And [God] taught Adam all of the names" (Qur'an, 2:31)?

One could say the same thing about the concept of intertextuality: the concept of intertextuality is also an example of misplaced postmodern exceptionalism. As Julie Sanders states in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, "The impulse towards intertextuality, and the narrative and architectural *bricolage* that can result from that impulse, is regarded by many as a central tenet of postmodernism."[25] If intertextuality is only supposed to be a postmodern phenomenon, then all hagiographic works are postmodern too or the concept of postmodernism itself needs reassessment.[26] Although I have generally avoided the term "intertextuality" in this study, the present work is nothing if it is not a study of intertextuality. Sanders herself alludes to the universal nature of intertextuality when she states, "A culture's mythology is its body of traditional narratives. Mythical literature depends upon, incites even, perpetual acts of reinterpretation, in new contexts, a process that embodies the very idea of appropriation."[27] Roland Barthes says much the same thing in *Mythologies* when he observes, "the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be appropriated."[28] This is to say that tropes, like knowledge in general, are not born in a vacuum.

Although it was necessary to write the present work as a study of historical representation, one could also imagine a future study of the Rabi'a narratives as a literary study of intertextuality. One of the values of the present work is that it prepares the ground for such a future study. However, such a study would be primarily a literary study instead of a study of historical representations, so I am happy to leave that project to someone else. On the other hand, I do not believe that it would take us too far off the subject to say a few words about how one might sketch out such a project. One way to begin this project would be to narrow the difference between literary and historical approaches to the Rabi'a narratives by viewing these forms of narrative as a sort of palimpsest. The palimpsest is a byproduct of medieval manuscript production that is created by erasing an earlier text and writing a new text over it. Sometimes one can discern traces of the earlier work beneath the later work. For reasons that are easy to understand, the palimpsest has become a popular metaphor in studies of intertextuality. However, the palimpsest is not the only metaphor to use for a study of this type. One could also use the example of looking for the impression of lost writing on a page below the page where the text was originally written. One can find traces of such a lost text by rubbing a pencil lightly over the surface of the bottom page so that the impression faintly appears. In metaphorical terms, this is what I tried to do in Chapters 1-4 of this work. In these chapters, I tried to reveal the lost image of the historical Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya by sketching in the cultural, intellectual, and religious background of Basra and the early Islamic world of her time.

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[25] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 17

[26] Mary Orr makes the same point when she calls for "histories of cultural production" to test the wider theoretical usefulness of intertextuality: "In the history of cultural recycling of which intertextuality is but a twentieth-century manifestation, what has not previously been given serious critical attention offers a good potential site for new investigation to test intertextuality's remits and qualities." Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Malden, Massachusetts and Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2003), 4

[27] Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 63

[28] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 119

One of the most influential literary theorists to use the metaphor of the palimpsest is the French structuralist Gérard Genette. This term appears as the title of his book *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. As an advocate of a more moderate "open structuralism" instead of radical post-structuralism, Genette is a useful guide for mapping out a future study of the poetics of the Rabi'a narratives because he avoids the modernist exceptionalism of post-structuralist theorists of intertextuality, such as Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes.[29] The phrase, "literature in the second degree," in the title of his book refers to a concept that he calls *architextuality*: "the entire set of general or transcendent categories— types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres— from which emerges each singular text."[30] The concept of architextuality takes literature to the "second degree" because it allows a "second" reading by demonstrating that each new text is derived in some way from a prior text. This concept also explains Genette's use of the palimpsest as a metaphor. According to this model, the author of the new text often "writes over" and obscures the prior text in a way that resembles a palimpsest. Instead of intertextuality, Genette prefers the term *transtextuality*. He defines this concept as "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts."[31] However, it is important to keep in mind that Genette is referring to different practices of *reading and writing* texts rather than ways of interpreting them. He sees his work as outlining a "socialized" theory of pragmatics, not of hermeneutics. Although his intention is to open up a richer experience of reading, he does not claim that one can find a hermeneutical key to interpretation that will unlock all the secrets of the text, like the Emerald Tablet or the Philosopher's Stone.[32]

Genette presents his theory of intertextuality in a trilogy of works. In *Introduction à l'architexte* (1979), he outlines the concept of textual relations in general; in *Palimpsestes* (1982), he discusses the intertextual relationships that shape the body of the text; in *Seuils* (1987, translated into English as *Paratexts*), he discusses the relations between the text and everything that is peripheral or contextual to it. Mary Orr aptly describes *Palimpsests* as a modern version of a Renaissance pattern book because it is primarily a catalogue of literary devices and tropes.[33] In this work, Genette posits five types of transtextual relationships. For the first relationship, *intertextuality*, he gives a definition that is more limited and restrictive than the definitions of Kristeva and Barthes. For Genette, intertextuality is "a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say . . . the actual presence of one text within another."[34] In other words, intertextuality for Genette is the inclusion of one text in another and mostly consists of quoting, plagiarism, or allusion.

The second transtextual relationship is *paratextuality*, which refers to elements that come from outside of the text itself and which serve to bind or organize the text. This category includes

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[29] Julia Kristeva is widely considered to have introduced the term "intertextuality" in the essay, "Word, Dialogue, Novel," the fourth chapter of *Semeiotikè*, originally published in 1969.. In this work, she states that intertextuality "is a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double." See Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*, 21.

[30] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, trans. (Lincoln, Nebraksa and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 1

[31] Ibid

[32] Ibid, 9

[33] Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*, 108

[34] Genette, *Palimpsests*, 1-2

titles, subtitles, prefaces, forwards, notes, epigraphs, blurbs, and other types of secondary signals. The rough draft of a text would also count as a paratext.[35] The third type of textual relationship, *metatextuality*, refers to commentary or any form of writing that unites a text to another text beyond its immediate genre. For Genette, metatextuality denotes the terrain occupied by critics and scholars.[36] The next type of transtextual relationship is *architextuality*, but here Genette gives the term a more narrow definition than in his introduction to this concept. This time architextuality refers to the "silent" relationship between a text and previous examples of its genre, such as a novel with other novels, a historical work with other historical works, or a hagiography with previous hagiographies.[37] The most important type of transtextual relationship discussed in *Palimpsests* is *hypertextuality*. Genette defines this concept in the following way: "[Hypertextuality is] a relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall of course call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary."[38] This is intentionally a very loose definition. The derivation in question may be of any kind: it may be either descriptive or intellectual and it may even include a text that does not refer to a prior text, but which cannot exist without the prior text.[39]

　　All of the transtextual relationships discussed by Genette in *Palimpsests* are present in one way or another in the Rabi'a narratives. *Intertextuality* is present whenever a later work quotes an earlier work, such as when Daylami quotes Ibn al-A'rabi's explanation of one of Rabi'a's statements. *Metatextuality* describes the explanation of Ibn al-A'rabi himself, since this category of transtextual relationships is based on commentary. *Architextuality* is present in the relationship between later medieval depictions of Rabi'a in Islamic literature and the earlier, unmentioned Christian tropes of female sainthood on which some of these depictions depend. The concept of architextuality also applies to the trope of "Rabi'a the Muslim Diotima," which is implicit in Abu Talib al-Makki's depiction of Rabi'a the Lover. Although Makki never mentions Diotima nor cites Plato's *Symposium*, he could not have created this trope without their prior existence. Even *paratextuality*— the most "modern" of Genette's transtextual relationships— is present in the Rabi'a narratives: this can be seen in the introductory section of 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a, where he tells people how to read his work. However, its status as an introduction is not signaled openly, as would be the case in modern literature. Finally, *hypertextuality* is present in the entire tradition of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya stories from narrative to myth. In Genette's terms, the history of the Rabi'a narratives would be an excellent example of hypertextuality.

　　Given the above considerations, it is not difficult to imagine how the content of Chapters 5 and 6 of the present work might be reconfigured as a study in the poetics of Muslim hagiography, using Genette's model of open structuralism and his categories of the transtextuality of narrative. One might approach this material by using 'Attar's *vita* of Rabi'a as the *hypotext* or prior text for a new study, because it historically provided the model for all subsequent representations of Rabi'a's life. However, 'Attar's chapter on Rabi'a is itself a *hypertext* (i.e., a text built upon one or more prior texts), because it involves what Genette calls the *intermodal*

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[35] Ibid, 3
[36] Ibid, 4
[37] Ibid
[38] Ibid, 5
[39] Ibid

transformation of previous narratives.[40] This refers to the fact that ʻAttar transformed the earlier tradition of Rabiʼa narratives into a new genre. In his creation of a *vita* for Rabiʼa, he changed a narrative tradition that was made up mostly of aphorisms and anecdotes into a story with a plot outline. That is to say, in Genetteʼs terms ʻAttar changed the mode of representation for Rabiʼa al-ʻAdawiyya from *intramodal variations* of narrative (i.e., aphorisms, anecdotes, quotations, etc.) to *dramatization*.[41]

Examining the amplification of the Rabiʼa narratives through dramatization allows them to be compared with similar types of dramatized narratives in other cultures and times. Such comparisons might include Greek tragedies derived from the mythic tradition or medieval European miracle plays based on the lives of saints. This might allow an easier transition to the study of film and television adaptations of the Rabiʼa narratives in the twentieth century, such as the movie *Rabiʼa al-ʻAdawiyya* and the miniseries *Rabiʼa Returns*. In Chapters 5 and 6, I made several references to ʻAttar writing the "outline" of Rabiʼaʼs *vita* as one would write the outline of a movie script. However, a study of poetics based on Genetteʼs concepts might also lead to a more nuanced treatment of this subject than writing from a historical perspective would allow. One could also look into Badawiʼs and El Sakkakiniʼs revisions of ʻAttarʼs *vita* of Rabiʼa in terms of what Genette calls *continuations* of a hypotext.[42] This practice moves the story in new directions because the concept of the continuation implies that the prior text has left important elements of the narrative unsaid. Badawiʼs alterations of ʻAttarʼs narrative involve *eleptic continuations* (i.e., filling gaps in the middle of the narrative), such as when he fills out the story of Rabiʼaʼs captivity.[43] However, both Badawi and El Sakkakini also make important *intermodal transformations* of the narrative by turning ʻAttarʼs story of Rabiʼa into a romance. This happens when they portray Rabiʼa as living a life of sensuality according to Kierkegaardʼs model of Aesthetic Man. Genette would call this transformation an act of *transmotivization*, because it provides the missing motive for the seemingly out-of-place sentence in ʻAttar that suggests that Rabiʼa may have been a musician.[44]

Much might also be said theoretically about what happens to hagiography when a narrative that was first written as a vehicle for a "principial" religious message is turned into a popular romance. This largely untouched subject of Islamic literature would invite its share of comparisons, such as with Anatole Franceʼs novel *Thaïs* discussed in Chapter 6, or other works of the religious romance genre, including contemporary movie and miniseries adaptations of the lives of iconic religious figures such as St. Francis of Assisi (U.S. and Europe), Confucius (China), and St. Teresa of Avila (Spain). Comparative cases such as these would provide excellent examples of Genetteʼs observation that in fictionalized versions of historical narratives, sometimes the prior text "is no longer anything but a pretext, the point of departure for an extrapolation disguised as an interpolation."[45]

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[40] Ibid, 277

[41] Ibid, 278

[42] Ibid, 161

[43] Ibid, 177

[44] See for example, Allen, *Intertextuality* 107, where he discusses this concept with respect to the animated film, *Prince of Egypt*.

[45] Genette, *Palimpsests*, 203

We could go on and on with such speculations, but it is time to stop. Each chapter in the present work could lead to other chapters or even new books in the future. For example, the discussion of Jahiz's concept of *bayan* in Chapter 1 opens up the possibility of a detailed study of this concept in the works of Jahiz or a study of cultural tropes in the Umayyad era. Chapter 2 suggests new ways to study asceticism in early Islam. Chapter 3 puts the concept of Love mysticism in Sufism in conversation with more secular treatments of Love theory in medieval Arabic literature; this in turn opens up new avenues for wider discussions of the place of Love theory in Islamic culture. Chapter 4 suggests new ways to look at the origins of Sufism without anachronistically reading later institutional models or theological formulations back onto the past. Finally, as we have just seen, Chapters 5 and 6 use the unique status of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya as master narrative and icon to suggest new ways to look at hagiographical representations as part of both history and literature.

Perhaps the most meaningful lesson to be learned from this study of Rabi'a from narrative to myth is that— to paraphrase Gérard Genette— every text as a historical phenomenon requires a relational reading, or to use the adjective coined by Phillipe Lejeune, a "palimpcestuous" reading.[46] Whenever a subject of historical narrative is at the same time a subject of literary narratives and myths, it is an act of blindness or bad faith to approach such a figure in only one analytical register. This is especially true for a Sufi icon like Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Just as every good book deserves to be read more than once, every meaningful narrative deserves to be restated or rewritten and every revered icon deserves to be restored. Even advocates of the "principial" meaning of Sufi hagiography should recognize that the concepts of *paratextuality* (i.e., the idea that there is an "inside" and an "outside" of a text) and *transtextuality* (i.e., the idea that texts are in dialogue with other texts) are also important to Sufism. With respect to paratextuality, the epistemology of Sufism in general is based on a distinction between the "outside" (*al-zahir*) and the "inside" (*al-batin*) of virtually everything, including texts. Because of this, transtextuality has become a major principle of Sufi hermeneutics, as the writings of Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240 CE) demonstrate.[47] Genette encapsulates the lesson to be learned from this in a way that only a male French scholar could: "One who really loves texts must wish from time to time to love (at least) two together."[48] Even before Genette, Harold Bloom used the metaphor of the palimpsest in the last chapter of *Kabbalah and Criticism*, which he titled, "The Necessity of Misreading." In this chapter he writes: "The reader is to every poet what the poet is to his precursor— every reader is therefore an ephebe [i.e., a disciple], every poem a forerunner, and every reading an act of 'influencing,' that is, of being influenced *by* the poem and of influencing any other reader to whom your reading is communicated."[49] The same could be said about the narrative tradition of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. In this tradition, and especially today through the influence of the Internet, every version of Rabi'a's story is a hypertext, and virtually every text has the potential of becoming a hypotext for another version.

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[46] Ibid, 399

[47] For a good example of transtextuality in the hermeneutics of Ibn al-'Arabi, see Sa'diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabi, Gender, and Sexuality* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

[48] Ibid

[49] Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism*, 50

Although I would not go as far as Bloom in calling every reading a misreading, I agree with his opinion that "tradition is a daemonic term."[50] In this statement, he is not referring to the Christian notion of demons of Hell, but to the pre-Christian Greek concept of the *daemon* (or the pre-Islamic Arabic *jinni*) as a spirit of inspiration. In this sense, the tradition of Rabi'a narratives is indeed "daemonic" because it continues to provide the spirit of inspiration for new narratives today. Bloom also seems correct in calling every reading of a work of poetics "belated." With respect to the present study as well as any other work on Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, however much we try to pin down and impose order on the narrative tradition, we find that it has already escaped us, and has gone on to create new narratives of which we have no clue. The situation remains today as it has been for the last 1200 years: Whenever the story of Rabi'a is told again, "the spirit leaps to the trope."[51]

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[50] Ibid,

[51] This phrase comes from the notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson. See ibid, 62.

SAMENVATTING

Deze studie analyseert de diverse manieren waarop de moslim heilige Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (ca. 717-801 AD) in zowel Soefi als niet-Soefi bronnen en literatuur wordt weergegeven. Hoewel er volgens de relevante bronnen ooit gedurende de 8st eeuw een vrouwelijke Soefi genaamd Rabi'a in Basra heeft gewoond, hebben we in feite weinig historisch betrouwbaar materiaal over deze vrouwelijke asceet. Het grootste deel van de verhalen over Rabi'a bestaat uit metaforische tropen die gebaseerd zijn op fictieve overleveringen, geconstrueerd in de eeuwen na haar dood. Dit proefschrift richt zich op de historische en literaire representaties van Rabi'a en op hoe de mythes over haar bestaan tot stand zijn gekomen, ondanks het gebrek aan historische bronnen. De historische en theoretische discussies over deze manier van representeren, worden in de inleiding van de proefschrift behandeld. In totaal onderscheid ik vier hoofdmotieven of *master narratives* die Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya als Soefi heilige typeren: Rabi'a de Lerares, Rabi'a de Asceet, Rabi'a de Minnares, en Rabi'a de Soefi. De hoofdstukken 1-4 behandelen deze motieven of tropen in detail. Hierbij traceren ze de ontwikkeling van deze hoofdmotieven, stellen de belangrijkste rethorische thema's erin aan de orde, en proberen vast te stellen welke doctrinaire betekenis aan de verhalen over Rabi'a kan worden toegeschreven. In hoofdstuk 5 en 6 wordt Rabi'a als ikoon of symbool geanalyseerd. Hierbij laat ik verder zien hoe het mogelijk was dat Rabi'a als belangrijke symbolische figuur is gaan fungeren in zowel mystieke als moderne seculiere representaties. Binnen deze context richt hoofdstuk 5 zich op de beschrijvingen van de Persische Soefie Farid al-Din al-'Attar (d. 1220 A.D.), die de eerste biografie, *vita,* van Rabi'a heeft geschreven die als model is gaan fungeren voor al de daaropvolgende biografische narratieven over haar. Hoofdstuk 6 behandelt de seculiere versies van het Rabi'a verhaal die gebruik maken van thema's en beelden uit moderne filosofische stromingen zoals existentialisme en feminisme. Deze beelden hebben verder ook beïnvloed hoe Rabi'a in films and op de TV wordt afgebeeld en weergegeven. In het slothoofdstuk evalueer ook de diverse historische en literaire theorieën en methoden die ik in dit onderzoek heb gebruikt om de problemen die de verhalen over Rabi'a oproepen, te verhelderen en naar vermogen op te lossen. Deze dissertatie is gebaseerd op zowel middeleeuwse als hedendaagse originele bronnen in het Arabisch, Persisch, en in diverse Europese talen. Behandeld worden zowel de belangrijkste scholen uit middeleeuws Irak, Syrie, Iran, en Egypte die de figuur van Rabi'a weergaven, als de moderne publicaties en cinematische voorstellingen over haar. Deze teksten en afbeeldingen als bronnen gebruikend, komt deze studie tot een kritische benadering van de historiografische en literaire studie van heiligheid.

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